

THE ADVENTURE OF BECOMING:
PROCESSING NONDUAL REALITY, PERSONS,
AND CONTEMPLATIVE CHRISTIAN MYSTAGOGY IN POSTMODERN CONTEXT

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by

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Abstract

The exploration that follows holds out an invitation to an adventure — an adventure of becoming. This project seeks to root itself in a process-relational perspective for the postmodern era — one that employs a neowhiteheadian position that includes the epistemological traditions of the postmodern landscape. In some sense, the central questions of this exploration are, “How does a process conception of reality transform our understanding of personhood and call us to a way of life that communes with that flow? And, how do modern discoveries in philosophy of science and cosmology both undergird and propel us toward a postmodern openness to contemplative Christian mystical practices and claims about nonduality?” In essence, this study is an articulation of the ways in which Whitehead’s philosophy or organism has cast a vision of reality that brings a critical harmony to those who might be seeking a robust account of reality that includes a religious dimension for postmodern life. This study seeks to develop a rich living, organic philosophy that aims at Beauty and creates Peace in the passage of one’s creaturely existence. Some of the core thinkers used to explore these topics are philosopher Alfred North Whitehead, theoretical physicist Carlo Rovelli, process philosophers Roland Faber and Catherine Keller, philosopher John Haught, and contemplative teacher Cynthia Bourgeault. Each of these thinkers will be brought into dialogue with one another so as to buoy the claims of this thesis — the claim that not only is reality thoroughly ‘nondual,’ but that the emerging interiority of the cosmos that has given birth to the religious dimension of lived experience invites us into a nondual posture of living in which we can commune with the infinite flow of becoming. This is a strong contrast to the substantialist, reductionist, materialist dualisms inherited from modernity,

and seeks to transcend them by means of a wholing, organic philosophy of becoming that, in praxis, is a multiplicitous mystagogy of passage.

Chapter II of this study will explore ‘The Beautiful Adventure,’ which is a survey of a Whiteheadian cosmology that transcends the bifurcations of modernity. Rooted in a poststructuralist, apophatic process perspective for the postmodern world, this chapter seeks to bring contemporary physics to bear on Whitehead’s world of events, which transforms the world of stasis into a world of becoming. This affirmation of a beautifully harmonious cosmopoetics of becoming affords those who engage with it an inside look at a universe that is still on the move, and will help us transition in our thinking about the very nature of reality itself. Chapter III dives in to the implications of a cosmos-in-becoming for the human subject. In it, we will explore the ways in which Whitehead’s relational perspective can be brought into harmony with the theories of evolution and emergence, while creating an evolutionary frame within which to reconceive of personhood in relational terms. This chapter will move strongly against the inherited conception of the Aristotelian ‘soul-substance,’ and instead push through to novel regions of a more Whiteheadian khoric conception of personhood that finds its becoming in a fundamentally alternative register than classical notions of self — one that also happens to be thoroughly ‘nondual.’ Chapter IV will explore what it means to incarnate nondual reality through the lens of the contemplative practice of Centering Prayer through the vision of Cynthia Bourgeault, a faculty at the Center for Action and Contemplation. This chapter will identify the challenges of defining nonduality in the West, and also explore the ways in which nonduality can be applied to a lived expression in praxis. This chapter will also explore the religious dimension of an awakening cosmic process, and discuss how the nonduality cultivated through the practice of

Centering Prayer invites a posture where one can commune with multiplicity in a way that rewires one's perceptive field. Lastly, this study will conclude with a mediation on what it is to find Peace amidst the passage of existence, and will culminate in a final chapter that explores a community of practice called the Way Collective, in Santa Barbara, CA — a community who has taken seriously the call to create a methodology of life together that employs a process-relational worldview in order to provide a novel expression of communal religious becoming for the postmodern world — one which creates a home for the increasing number of spiritual but not religious people with a Christian sacred canopy who are in exodus from the faith communities of their youth.

Table of Contents

Abstract	iv
Chapter I: Introduction & Methodology	1
Chapter II: The Beautiful Advance: A Creative Cosmos of Events in Process	17
A) Modernity and Materialist Bifurcations.....	19
B) Overcoming the Bifurcation — From Nature to Reality.....	23
C) Imagining Becoming.....	28
D) Integrating Cosmic Consciousness.....	35
E) The Events of Processual Reality.....	37
F) Life in Motion — Creativity.....	44
G) The Tragic Beauty of Ephemerality.....	47
Chapter III: The Nest of Becoming — The Emerging Personhood of Nature	52
A) On Relationality.....	55
B) Toward Humanity — Evolution and Emergence.....	58
C) Becoming Human — Postmodern Personhood.....	65
D) Against Soul-Substance.....	73
E) Cosmic Interiority — An Anticipatory Approach.....	78
Chapter IV: Incarnating Nondual Reality: The Posture of Contemplative Wholing	84
A) In No Time — The Difficulty of Being Present.....	85
B) Evolutionary Spirituality.....	91
C) A Religion of Becoming — Nondual Resonances.....	96
D) Defining Nonduality — Western and Eastern Harmonies.....	100

E) Centering Prayer — The Praxis of Nondual Cultivation as a Mystagogy of Becoming.....	107
F) Wholing — The Beauty-full Peace of Passage.....	113
Chapter V: Divine Poiesis After the Death of God.....	117
A) The Weakness of Postmodern Radical Theology.....	122
B) Yet Perhaps Nietzsche Might Be Affirmed?.....	128
C) The Harmonious Divine Embrace.....	132
Chapter VI: A Communal Exploration of Processual, Nondual Praxis - Way Collective..	141
Bibliography.....	146

Chapter I: Introduction & Methodology

The dawning sense in modern times that we are in a meaningless universe, that our most cherished meanings find no endorsement in the cosmos, or in the will of God, has often been described as a traumatic loss, a second and definitive expulsion from paradise.

— Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*¹

The following thesis is an exploration of philosophy, science, and religion in postmodern context — and what results is a cosmologically-rooted speculative philosophy of becoming with an emphasis on the value of Beauty that has inherent theological implications for lived experience. In the West, the ‘dawning sense’ of modern meaninglessness, so eloquently contoured by philosopher Charles Taylor in the above passage, is the new traumatically immanent reality for those seeking value, especially in the form of religious meaning, after the Enlightenment. The secularizing impulse of Western society, especially as seen in the United States of America, has had enormous ripple effects on the influence of religious life in contemporary culture. Philip Clayton and Steven Knapp have cited that this phenomenon of the decreasing engagement of religious life is especially common amongst Millennials. They write: “A major national survey recently published [in 2010] in *USA Today* shows that 72 percent of ‘Millennials’ — Americans between the ages of 18 and 29 — now consider themselves ‘spiritual but not religious.’”² With this demographic, referred to popularly as ‘the nones’, on the rise, the future of religious life in the West is shifting rapidly and dramatically; and it seems as though

¹ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 587.

² Philip Clayton and Steven Knapp, *The Predicament of Belief: Science, Philosophy, Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 143, italics Clayton and Knapp’s.

religion's contribution to the fading world of meaning and value is getting bleaker as culture continues to move on from its adherence. The causes of decline in traditional churches are chronicled as follows by Clayton and Knapp. First, "church attendance is no longer socially necessary."³ Second, "people no longer believe that church attendance provides the only or the most important means of establishing and maintaining a sufficiently strong connection with God...An increasing number of Americans believe they can pursue their spiritual interests without the need of teaching by, or guidance from, a religious community."⁴ Third, "the dramatically increased mobility of individuals and families, as well as the decreased stability of family units, makes it harder to develop extended cross-generational ties to any particular church."⁵ And lastly, "communities are not only in continual flux; they are far more diverse in beliefs, values, and social identities than they were in earlier eras. This makes it harder to assemble of maintain congregations with sufficient critical mass."⁶ For these reasons and more, fewer and fewer young people are generally interested in the claims of religion or in participation in a community of religious practice, although many of them remain *spiritual* — that is, remain interested in something like 'God' or 'spirit.' Thus, perhaps a way forward will be found in some novel harmony between theory and praxis that leads toward a new methodology of religious communal life that makes space for both Millennials who are spiritual but not religious and those affected by the epistemological shifts in Western, post-Enlightenment thought to regain their religious sensibilities. Taking this migration seriously, it is conceivable that there is a way

³ Clayton and Knapp, *The Predicament of Belief: Science, Philosophy, Faith*, 144.

⁴ Clayton and Knapp, *The Predicament of Belief: Science, Philosophy, Faith*, 144.

⁵ Clayton and Knapp, *The Predicament of Belief: Science, Philosophy, Faith*, 144.

⁶ Clayton and Knapp, *The Predicament of Belief: Science, Philosophy, Faith*, 144.

forward that integrates the rationalism of the modern philosophy and the empiricism of the age of science and contemporary cosmology, while taking a speculative approach to articulating anew the religious possibility for today. Along these lines, Clayton and Knapp question the nature of religious claims in postmodern context:

What is ultimately the case? Is there a source of all of that is, and is there a direction in which everything is tending? Are the source and the goal the same; is there a single reality that encompasses them both? And if so, does that reality have anything to do with us, with the way we live and the things we say and do here, in the brief time we spend on a minuscule fragment of the totality of everything there is?⁷

The reality is that these questions are as fascinating and alluring as ever, and developments in the aforementioned fields of science, philosophy, and religion have made the conversation surrounding these questions both tantalizing and exuberant — that is, overflowing with life and possibility. This study will provide an account of such a possibility, while employing a Whiteheadian process-relational interpretation of reality to reframe it in terms of events, which in-turn, will reframe personhood, and ultimately, push us toward a praxis of becoming that provides novel possibilities in, through, and beyond the problems facing religion today. This speculative approach is always already speaking in the voice of a *metaphorical* “imaginative leap” — thus denoting a postmodern methodology that dares to speak constructively about the following metaphysical, philosophical, theological, and pedagogical speculations.⁸ This study also recognizes that this type of postmodern speculative philosophy is always already and inherently “de/constructive,” and therefore is a temporal speculation that is always subject to both the movement of transforming process and eventually also to further speculation.⁹

⁷ Clayton and Knapp, *The Predicament of Belief: Science, Philosophy, Faith*, 1.

⁸ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1985), 4.

⁹ Roland Faber, *The Divine Manifold* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014), 74.

The milieu of Western post-Enlightenment Christianity (used here as a specific tradition within which to reflect on the current wider Western religious environment) is one that has been deeply riddled with propositional belief structures that are held up despite their discord with contemporary findings in science and subsequent philosophical theory. The unabashed confidence of propositional Christian belief as it functions in the life of Western Christians — especially among Evangelicals — has superseded rational and empirical speculations of reality masquerading under the name of ‘faith.’ Contrasting this odd form of certainty about religious claims is the willful ignorance owned by scientists and cosmologists, as here illustrated in this quote by theoretical physicist Carlo Rovelli:

An acute awareness of our ignorance is the heart of scientific thinking. It is thanks to this awareness of the limits of our knowledge that we have learned so much... To learn something, it is necessary to have the courage to accept that what we think we know, including our most rooted convictions, may be wrong, or at least naive.¹⁰

This embrace of naïveté is the shift that many migrating Millennials have already made, in part due to the technological advance that has given them access to seemingly endless droves of information at their literal fingertips. But, interestingly enough, religious people have a more difficult time making this shift, as their religious claims are not usually rooted in a scientific epistemology, but rather in a-scientific theological claims about divine realities that display almost no critical thinking skills whatsoever. It should strike us as both ironic and strange that a community of believers who do not employ the scientific method find certainty in their beliefs, while the community of scientists who do serious rational inquiry into reality find unknowing and mystery — which is perhaps the true nature of something like ‘faith.’ The peculiar flip of

¹⁰ Carlo Rovelli, *Reality Is Not What It Seems: The Journey to Quantum Gravity* (New York, NY: Riverhead Books, 2018), 259.

logic and faith seen in the phenomenon of the religious holding of propositional beliefs as if they were empirically true is a post-Enlightenment development, and, as such, falls prey to the following critical comments around ideology by philosopher Alfred North Whitehead:

Should we not distrust the jaunty assurance with which every age prides itself that it at last has hit upon the ultimate concepts in which all that happens can be formulated? The aim of science is to seek the simplest explanations of complex facts. We are apt to fall into the error of thinking that the facts are simple because simplicity is the goal of our quest. The guiding motto in the life of every natural philosopher should be, Seek simplicity and distrust it.¹¹

Although the previous passage from Whitehead's *The Concept of Nature* is a methodological statement about the scientific method, the naming of that 'jaunty assurance' with which every age prides itself seems to apply directly to much of the contemporary Christianity of the West. This "sin of certainty," as author Peter Enns has so fittingly called it, is one which pushes directly against the scientific method.¹² For, as Rovelli reflects again: "Science is not reliable because it provides certainty. It is reliable because it provides us with the best answers we have at present."¹³ This idea of coming up with the best answers we have at present is one which it would behoove religious people to entertain and apply to their perspective as they live in an age which continues to thirst for new ways of knowing that continually thrusts us toward new horizons. Here, Rovelli notes this stark contrast between the epistemologies of science and religion:

The search for knowledge is not nourished by certainty: it is nourished by a radical distrust in certainty. This means not giving credence to those who say they are in possession of the truth. For this reason, science and religion frequently finding

¹¹ Alfred North Whitehead, *The Concept of Nature: Turner Lectures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 109.

¹² Peter Enns, *The Sin of Certainty* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2016), 16.

¹³ Rovelli, *Reality Is Not What It Seems: The Journey to Quantum Gravity*, 260.

themselves on a collision course...the scientific spirit distrusts whoever claims to be the one *having* ultimate answers or privileged access to Truth.¹⁴

In this quote, Rovelli so simply and beautifully articulates the clash and contrast between religion and science in postmodernity. Science distrusts those having ultimate truth claims, and religion often claims to have them. But, what if there were a way beyond the propositional, reductionist claims of religion on the one hand, and a sort of reductionist scientism on the other? What if philosophy was a mediating discipline between the two to give a robust account of reality with an applied praxis of life for today? What if, just as, “Though rooted in previous knowledge, science is an adventure based on continuous change,” — religion was also an adventure based on continual transformation, and even more so, what if all of reality for that matter indicated the same principle?¹⁵ This study will provide a speculative articulation of reality that takes into account these contemporary challenges — especially addressing the methodological position of this paper as an articulation of how we might conceive of mystery as that which is infinitely knowable in its surplus, and yet still unexplained fully by rational, scientific inquiry. In essence, the following methodological exploration will speak of why we might speculate at all about these things given the inherent difficulty of doing so in the postmodern landscape of epistemologies.

Much of the work in developing this thesis’ methodology was influenced by a course entitled *Whitehead and Postmodern Thought* with professor Roland Faber at Claremont School of Theology in the Fall of 2018. Some of the following remarks have been used in a paper

¹⁴ Rovelli, *Reality Is Not What It Seems: The Journey to Quantum Gravity*, 261, italics Rovelli’s.

¹⁵ Rovelli, *Reality Is Not What It Seems: The Journey to Quantum Gravity*, 261.

submitted to that class, but they also provided a helpful framing to contribute to the flow of this project, and are thus integrated here to help justify the position of this paper. Given the difficulty of the speculative task in postmodern philosophy, it is crucial to give an account of the perspective from which this study is located, so as to better understand the particular claims of this project. Thus, firstly, it must be noted that postmodernism is notably murky, in part, due to the many confluent streams of thought which comprise it and also the inherent difficulty and lack of uniformity in nailing down exactly the when, where, and what of postmodernism. But, postmodernism can also be seen as a kind of pluralistic postmodern-prism in its affect, refracting the varying lights and colors of the postmodern spectrum — evasive though they may be in grasping at them. Thus, in order to situate oneself as a thinker in one of the schools of thought which shine forth from the light of the postmodern prism, one must also first acknowledge that, in essence: “There is no unified postmodern theory, or even a coherent set of positions. Rather, one is struck by the diversities between theories often lumped together as ‘postmodern’ and the plurality — often conflictual — of postmodern positions.”¹⁶ The ensuing senses of bottomlessness and liminality in postmodernism are in part both its import as it hits at the heart of its critiques of modernism, and also the very reason many are wary of navigating them for fear of getting lost — stuck somewhere in the in-betweenness of it all. In essence, postmodernism roots itself in the critique of modern theory, where modernity becomes criticized “for its search for a foundation of knowledge, for its universalizing and totalizing claims, for its hubris to supply apodictic truth, and for its allegedly fallacious rationalism. Defenders of modernity, by

¹⁶ Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations* (New York, NY: Guilford, 1991), 2.

contrast, attack postmodern relativism, irrationalism, and nihilism.”¹⁷ Although authors Steven Best and Douglas Kellner sweep quite broadly in this initial assessment of postmodernism from 1991, they have hit on a core characteristic of postmodernism — namely, that postmodernism is a reaction to the theories of modernity, with their strong emphasis on foundationalism, essentialism, and a type of rationalism that leads to unmediated propositional truth claims about material reality. Many scholars in the postmodern era have looked for a way beyond the trappings of modernity, and many have succeeded in charting a course beyond these modern confines. In 2002, theologians Catherine Keller and Anne Daniell compiled a volume of articles entitled: *Process and Difference: Between Cosmological and Poststructuralist Postmodernisms*. In it, they contour a form of Whiteheadian possibility for postmodernity by situating the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead somewhere between contemporary cosmology and poststructuralism — the school of thought critical of the linguistic structuralism that arose during modernity. In this situation, these scholars speak of these two possibilities in such a manner that, when they are combined, create even more novel potentials for postmodern philosophy. Anne Daniell, one of the co-editors of the volume, remarks:

Both help to unmask the abstractions (process) or power-knowledge regimes (poststructuralism) which claim a status of absolute or unmediated ‘Truth’... While there may be important surface differences between these two postmodernisms, examining them at a deeper level may also reveal an array of kindred methods and hermeneutical aims.¹⁸

¹⁷ Best and Kellner, *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations*, 4.

¹⁸ Catherine Keller and Anne Daniell, *Process and Difference: Between Cosmological and Poststructuralist Postmodernisms* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002), xix.

In this statement, there is an affirmation that if both traditions of process cosmological speculation and poststructuralist philosophy à la the French school are somehow melded together, a kindred, confluent methodology may rise to the fore that presents thinkers looking for a way forward through the murkiness of postmodernism with a better option that transcends both — and in so doing, creates a new kind of immanence wherein the light refracted from this perspective shines ahead toward the “coming of process poststructuralisms and deconstructive cosmologies.”¹⁹ These process poststructuralisms and deconstructive cosmologies have the ability to lure us beyond the modern philosophical mechanisms of meaninglessness and toward a zest-filled philosophical adventure through a postmodern philosophical landscape where there is always more life to be called forth. At first glance, these novel combinations might seem antithetical in their contrasts, but when placed in a critical harmony, they will provide an opportunity to inhabit a living philosophy for the postmodern era in which, “If the Whiteheadian criterion of ‘contrast’ be consistently entertained, then the ‘lure for feeling,’ which some process thinkers take from poststructuralism, will exceed the impulse either to separate the two movements as incommensurable or to merge them as one... Contrast hybridizes a new one from many.”²⁰ Just what this ‘new one from many’ is, and how it functions to both critique the claims of modernity and offer us a way beyond it will be explored in this study and offered up as an existential meditation on the human philosophical journey toward finding value somewhere along the murky postmodern landscape

¹⁹ Keller and Daniell, *Process and Difference: Between Cosmological and Poststructuralist Postmodernisms*, 5.

²⁰ Keller and Daniell, *Process and Difference: Between Cosmological and Poststructuralist Postmodernisms*, 4.

Before venturing into the world of Whitehead's 'events,' one reading this study might be wondering — “Why would anyone dare endeavor at all in a rational, empirical, speculative pursuit in a world where poststructuralist critiques of the projects of modern language and meta-claims have shown that there are no ultimate structures that disclose to us the truth about reality?” In essence, there may be questions around why one would speculate at all given the antiessentialist, nonfoundational, and inherently de/constructive nature of the philosophical task at hand? As aforementioned, postmodernism on the whole attempts to attack foundationalisms of every kind — namely that there are axiological truths on which philosophical systems can be built. It also attacks the historical dimension of epistemology, with its determinate teleological narrative productions.²¹ In its multiplicitous critique of modernism, one of the elements which has been distilled and called into question is the claims of a school of thought called structuralism. Structuralism arose out of the work of a linguist and semiotician named Ferdinand de Saussure, who discovered that language could be understood in terms of underlying grammatical structures that propped up a system of meaning that could be divided into signifiers and signifieds. In this, Saussure thought that language could be understood as a system where differentiation played a central role in the semiology of language — namely that the meanings of words are not found because certain letters, when combined, have a definitive referent, but rather because they are related to the underlying structure of a given language that places them in a differential relationship with other signifiers in the linguistic system; and that this relationship of structured difference is what helps lead interpreters to a correct meaning in a given language.

²¹ Roland Faber, “Being and Becoming I: Modes of Performance” (Lecture, Claremont School of Theology, September 19, 2018).

Poststructuralism then, is the final rejecting of the structure that says that there is any claim that contains the final truth, meaning, or foundation for interpretation.²² Here, structuralism could be equated with any other sort of reductionism — such as the scientific and religious forms already explored — in their claim that ultimate propositions can be proven, although the structuralist form of reductionism is linguistic in nature. In short, poststructuralism critiques the claims of structuralism by refuting its claim that language can represent or somehow match the structure of reality.²³ It refutes it by showing that the linguistic structures are themselves constructions, which means that they too are susceptible to the same semiotic move — they too are built, and thus cannot provide direct insight into the actual nature of things.

This has led postmodern philosophers like Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, and Jacques Lacan, in their various schools of continental thought to pick up the mantle of philosophical and psychological poststructuralism and push the conversation into new regions of discourse. All of these thinkers in some way address signifiers and signifieds and how to relate to them, but the basic relations between them are moved beyond a direct phenomenology and toward deep, unfixed structures that reside beyond cultures in a sort of groundless infinite play of structures upon structures.²⁴ In this regard, it can be claimed that there is no foundation (a sort of antifoundationalism), but there are structures (an affirmation of a kind of structuralism that acknowledges the infinite play of structures as a sort of performative post/structuralism). This leads to a perspective in which one can acknowledge that our creation of reality is always just

²² Faber, “Being and Becoming I: Modes of Performance,” Lecture.

²³ Faber, “Being and Becoming I: Modes of Performance,” Lecture.

²⁴ Roland Faber, “System and Noise I: Deconstruction” (Lecture, Claremont School of Theology, September 26, 2018).

that — an abstraction that has a built-in arbitrariness to it — but that it is also in some sense necessary to construct these statements in order to discuss existence in any meaningful way. Thus, if meaning and sign are not naturally connected, then the deeper consequence is that nature is nearly indistinguishable, and meaning is relegated to social or cultural determination — which speaks to the postmodern death of the subject.²⁵ This also thus becomes a dismissal of the notion of ‘metanarratives’ — totalizing stories that give forth actual insight into the reality of things — and is thus a move into a relativizing space wherein localized narratives often reign supreme. A further critique also stands that this claim of relativization is of course yet another metanarrative, but the truth of the poststructuralist deconstruction of metanarrative also stands in that the ‘what’ of what our stories tell us are not beyond arbitrary abstraction, but are rather invited to be considered precisely *as* arbitrary abstractions that carry with them an explanatory discourse — one that inevitably transfigures as the creative advance of the world continues forward and there are new experiences to express linguistically in philosophical reflection. This poststructuralist sens/ability creates problems for those who continue to purport the modern project of structuralism and consequentially, metaphysics, but it also creates possibilities for those who desire to surmount structuralism in the name of journeying forward into the postmodern landscape.

One must look no further than Whitehead’s own terminology in his understanding of the task of philosophy in order to find a de/constructive response to this impasse. When Whitehead chose the term ‘speculative’ to describe his philosophy, he chose it with his poetic, literary background in mind. Speculation needs both evidence and imagination as it looks for ways to

²⁵ Faber, “System and Noise I: Deconstruction,” Lecture.

generalize, and then just as in the scientific task, more testing and generalizing must come as Rovelli mentioned earlier. It is an inherently experiential and desystematized process. One must acknowledge, as did Whitehead, that if you systematize it, you fly away into the realm of abstraction. The word ‘speculation’ actually comes from Shakespeare — speculation is something that makes you see — and in the case of Whitehead’s thought — potentially see in a new way. If this is in any way the poetic background for speculation in Whitehead, then it is an attempt at seeing²⁶ — indeed as a sort of cosmopoetic peering. Thus this speculative method is a seeing philosophy, but ‘seeing’ here means that all the instruments you use in order to see help cast a sort of projected vision of the whole. In Whitehead’s own words:

Speculative Philosophy can be defined as the endeavor to frame a coherent, logical, necessary system of general ideas in terms of which every element of our experience can be interpreted. Here ‘interpretation’ means that each element shall have the character of a particular instance of the general scheme.²⁷

‘System’ here might be read as a gathering of relationships that aid in the interpretation of one’s experience. In essence, what he is admitting here is that ‘all is interpretation,’ which is thoroughly postmodern; and yet, he dares to speculate anyway. The point that this statement makes about experience is that all experiences are infinite precisely because there is nothing beyond them. Experience lends itself to no finality of interpretation because there is always a stream of more experiences to interpret.²⁸ Given this Whiteheadian affirmation, it’s important to note here that this is an attempt at disentangling generality from universality. Whitehead is saying that any generalization will lead to seeking ever-new, non-hierarchical generalizations —

²⁶ Roland Faber, “Being and Becoming II: Event Ontology” (Lecture, Claremont School of Theology, October 17, 2018).

²⁷ Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2010), 222.

²⁸ Faber, “Being and Becoming II: Event Ontology,” Lecture.

which means that our abstractions about reality will always be susceptible to creative new applications — *all* of them, including the one in this study. If Whitehead is correct that the universe truly is an adventure in creative advance, then there are also some experiences that do not even exist yet. And, as any generalization is always already based on a certain body of experiences, in a universe like ours, there will always be ever-new generalities.²⁹

Thus, speculative philosophy in the tradition of Whitehead is not seeking some structure to explain everything that is, but rather to seek structures after they have arisen — which is thoroughly nonfoundationalist.³⁰ In Whitehead's own words from the closing of the Preface in his magnum opus: *Process and Reality*, which, in its own scope is a feat of magnificent proportions, presents its own findings with this disclaimer in its introduction: "There remains the final reflection, how shallow, puny, and imperfect are efforts to sound the depths in the nature of things. In philosophical discussion, the merest hint of dogmatic certainty as to finality of statement is an exhibition of folly."³¹ Whitehead's own unifications and subsequent generalizings, we will find, will open up the multiplicity of reality *as it has been* disclosed through sense-experience. But, an adventuring universe will always move beyond the generalizations of its time in order to express novelty that which is always 'to come.' Thus, if one is to take both multiplicity and Whitehead seriously, the subsequent process-postmodern philosophical methodology is always already inherently not only constructive, but also de/constructive — that is, it attempts to construct ever-again after its own constructions. Along these lines, we can come to a sort of postmodern cosmology of multiplicity that transcends the

²⁹ Faber, "Being and Becoming II: Event Ontology," Lecture.

³⁰ Faber, "Being and Becoming II: Event Ontology," Lecture.

³¹ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, xiv.

temptations of modernism. This transcendence can be developed out in many ways, like that seen in philosopher Monica A. Coleman's postmodern womanist theological application, in which her worldview: "Is postmodern in that it transcends 'the individualism, anthropocentrism, patriarchy, mechanization, economism, consumerism, nationalism, and militarism of the modern period.'" ³² Postmodern philosophies that seek to have a vibrant, living, practical application for today must engage in the speculative task while integrating the transcendent de/constructive elements of postmodernity, which will always end up being nonfoundationalist.

Thus, in so much as this methodological approach to address religion in a postmodern landscape is constructive, as aforementioned, it is also inherently de/constructive. In so much as this project is postmodern, it is decidedly nonfoundationalist and antiessentialist in the tradition of process philosophers in the line of Roland Faber and Catherine Keller. In so much as this thesis borders on the theological, it is also theopoetic — and indeed, perhaps theopoietic. All of these methodological affirmations point us toward a posture of nonduality in which speculation is welcome as a generalization of experience that is never final. This term will be explored in further detail in Section III of this study, however it here represents the holding together of the postmodern-process tradition of rational, empirical speculation as congruent with the nonfoundationalist, antiessentialist, de/constructive approach as it applies to the task at hand — reframing reality and personhood for the sake of a praxis of becoming that becomes an invitation to an adventure. Let me be clear here at the outset that it is the contention of this thesis that the rational conclusion at the end of empirical postmodern philosophical inquiry is *pure becoming*

³² Monica A. Coleman, "Metaphysics, Metaphor, and Multiplicity: A Postmodern Womanist Theology for Today's Thorniest Religious Issues," *Political Theology* 18, no. 4 (May 2017): 345.

— that is, *pure becoming* as reflected in this invitation to a speculative posture of holding both knowing and unknowing together. Given that Whitehead’s vision of creative advance (read here an emphasis on novel movements as contrasted with the claim of a hardline conception of event-based ontology — although both are likely different semantic ways to say the same thing — while one calls to attention a stronger metaphysical commitment than the other) is one in which we are lured to consider how to reinterpret our concepts of the self and of the religious dimension of life in terms of *events* rather than *substances* — it leads to an embrace of *pure becoming* over the substance of *being*. Creative advance places the emphasis of interpreting experience on dealing first with the notion of creativity as central to one’s common-sense understanding of one’s experience. And, as Whitehead defines creativity as “the universal of universals characterizing ultimate matter of fact” and “the principle of *novelty*,”³³ his embrace of this novel advance into ever-new expressions of reality is one that challenges its readers to consider for themselves how this might be applied to their own praxis of life. What might this creative, novel philosophy invite evolutive human beings into in the 21st century? How might we posture ourselves in our given context to welcome the creative transformation of reality for the sake of a wider realization of civilizational value? How can we form ourselves as people to invite this creative transformation? Is there a truly posture of nonduality that human beings can take to more harmoniously participate in the benevolent flow of reality? All these and more will be addressed in the following study through the methodological approach outlined in this introduction, including a discussion around the sense of Peace that may be available to creatures who are becoming and perishing in an adventuring universe.

³³ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 21, italics Whitehead’s.

Chapter II: The Beautiful Advance: A Creative Cosmos of Events in Process

At the heart of the nature of things, there are always the dream of youth and the harvest of tragedy. The Adventure of the Universe starts with the dream and reaps tragic Beauty. This is the secret of the union of Zest with Peace: — That suffering attains its end in a Harmony of Harmonies. The immediate experience of this Final Fact, with its union of Youth and Tragedy, is the sense of Peace. In this way the World receives its persuasion towards such perfections as are possible for its diverse individual occasions.

— Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*³⁴

We live in an adventuring universe. The English word ‘adventure’ comes from the the Latin *ad*, which means *to*, and *venire*, which means *to come*.³⁵ It finds its heart in its sense of an expectancy of that which is always ‘to come’ or ‘beyond’ itself. Some of adventure’s earliest uses in the middle centuries were rooted in concepts like wonder and marvel, but also in elements like risk and danger.³⁶ There is a riskiness to adventuring — one that is often conflated with a journey into the unknown. Risk assumes an unknown future, and consequently a present made up of novel possibilities. This is exactly the kind of adventure that philosopher Alfred North Whitehead implied in his works, *Process and Reality* — his magnum opus on the adventure of the cosmos, and *Adventures of Ideas* — which chronicles this cosmic adventure through the lens of human civilization and value theory. There is a vulnerability in this type of adventure — one which risks the novel beauty of creativity, a type of passing novelty with a perpetually perishing element to it. This is true not only of individual occasions, as Whitehead has referred to in the above quote, but also of the universe as a whole. Creativity is always pulsing at the center of reality, luring the cosmos into ever-new iterations of itself. It is this spark of advance (and

³⁴ Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 296, italics mine.

³⁵ “adventure,” Online Etymology Dictionary, accessed November 19, 2018, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/adventure>.

³⁶ “adventure.”

coincidentally, of adventure) that resides deep in the organism of reality. Our contemporary ability to now observe and theorize about “widely varying domains of nature: from the macrocosmic structure of the universe to the microcosm of elementary particles” has given us significant insight as to the motive nature of things.³⁷ But, it also gives us interpretive insight as to the motive of reality — that its aim is to achieve a certain level of harmonic realization of the tragic beauty of its passing spatio-temporal events. In this section, we will zoom out to view reality as a whole that is many, and we will also zoom in to examine the nature of individual events, and then we will zoom out again from the inside to give an account for the adventure of the cosmos that all life anticipates in its own becoming. Whitehead once more describes this cosmic adventure as one in which:

In this Supreme Adventure, the Reality which the Adventure transmutes into its Unity of Appearance, requires the real occasions of the advancing world each claim its due share of attention. This Appearance, thus enjoyed, is the final Beauty with which the Universe achieves its justification. This Beauty has always within it the renewal derived from the Advance of the Temporal World. It is the immanence of the Great Fact including its initial Eros and this final Beauty which constitutes the zest of self-forgetful transcendence belonging to civilization at its height.³⁸

This ‘Supreme Adventure,’ as so poetically conceived of by Whitehead, is one which contains the beautiful appearance (another way of speaking of spatio-temporal reality) as the advance of the temporal world. Notice the conflation of these two terms — appearance and advance, for they constitute for us an interpretive clue as to how to understand what Whitehead means by this final Beauty. Appearance implies disappearance, and thus a temporal, passing flow — while advance implies movement — a sort of moving forward of things. In Alfred North Whitehead’s

³⁷ Carlo Rovelli, *Seven Brief Lessons on Physics* (New York, NY: Riverhead Books, 2016), 23.

³⁸ Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 295-296.

grand scheme of his philosophy of organism, we are offered a way beyond the dualisms of modernity and toward a new, multiplicitous whole — a way of overcoming the various bifurcations of modernity and moving toward a novel unification. This is surely an overcoming of the separations between mind/matter, soul/body, as it is many others, but what Whitehead offers a postmodern audience situated between poststructuralist and cosmological critiques of modernity is a truly vibrant and alluring alternative lens for experiencing reality — one that shows that the adventure of the universe is truly and thoroughly nondual in its application as many of the great spiritual teachers have said: it is not one — not two, but a sort of unification of difference — a oneing of the many in every moment of becoming. Before exploring this offering in depth, the bifurcations and materialism of modernity must be exposed before putting reality back together in terms of events. The goal of this section will be to expose the modern mechanism for what it is, then to show forth in detail Whitehead's own reconnection of reality in terms of events, and then to conceive of what a view from the inside of that reality could mean for people today.

Modernity and Materialist Bifurcations

In moving toward seeing through the lens of a Whiteheadian process-postmodern cosmology, one must first understand what Whitehead was up against in his reconception of the modern philosophical scheme. In his work, he was engaging some of the most influential philosophers of the modern era who helped create the bifurcations (read dualisms) of the modern mind. There have been few philosophers who have had so great an impact upon the modern mind (especially on the European continent) as Immanuel Kant. His metaphysics, with its emphasis on

the rational mind, removed causation away from of the experiencing subject and, via the critique of pure reason, placed it rather upon the mental faculties by which the perceiving subject senses an experience. This turn of emphasis toward the mental interpretation of various forms of experience left nature in a valueless state, precisely because one cannot know anything of reality through pure reason and is rather left with bare sense datum which are only phenomena layered over what Alfred North Whitehead referred to as a 'vacuous actuality.' This notion limits human knowledge in the sense that what is given from the natural world doesn't give a basis for thinking in terms of causality, space, and time. Nevertheless, Kant did affirm that the only way one can understand the world is in terms of space-time and causality, revealing that he himself believed that the human mind is constituted in such a way that one necessarily interprets the data in these specific categories. However, none of this way of thinking challenges the idea that *the only thing given is sense data*. Whereas Whitehead placed the emphasis on pre-cognitive emotional perception, Kant placed it on cognitive perception. So, if in this sense, perceiving humans are the ones who have actually ordered the universe via their perception of it, then Kant necessarily relegates addressing questions of value to his Second Critique, which deals more directly with practical reason and ethics. The difficulty with this stance, however, is that because of the metaphysical prohibitions set up in his First Critique, this reopening of questions of value does not actually apply to the natural world itself, but only *as it appears* phenomenologically to sensing beings. If Descartes had initiated a sense of metaphysical alienation in his emphasis on cognitive faculties, then Kant, although he did not ultimately accept Cartesian metaphysics, has thus consequentially confirmed the alienation. It is through the Critique of Practical Reason that Kant felt comfortable addressing the questions of better or worse and right or wrong because he

had already dealt with notions of pure reason. Hence it was in the primacy of practical reason rather than theoretical reason that Kant indicated that questions of value are inescapable, and that both religion and ethics have a necessary place in this conversation. It can be seen then, how Kant's mechanistic metaphysics has rendered nature as a barren landscape devoid of intrinsic value and the questions surrounding value to a deontologized form of rationality.

This reductionism came from the tradition of Hume, Descartes, and Kant, who were all culpable for having relegated the intrinsic value of Beauty to having "No quality in things themselves: It exists merely in the mind which contemplates them; and each mind perceives a different beauty,"³⁹ or in other words, placing it in the ever-popular phrase: "the eye of the beholder." This move has so subjectified something like the value of Beauty that it has ceased to be an intrinsic quality within the structure of reality for the experiencing subject. Here, process philosopher Sandra Lubarsky has noted that, in Kant's system: "Beauty is not an objective quality of the world, but a mental laminate, layered onto physical forms by our subjective experience."⁴⁰ Thus, the bifurcation inherited from the Humean-Cartesian-Kantian tradition is one in which not only have human beings been plucked out of the natural order, but it is also one in which mental phenomena such as consciousness or thought act as a sort of laminate upon the materialist physicality of substantial things as observed by Lubarsky. But it is not solely the work of these modern philosophers that has created the materialist bifurcation here. Whitehead, in his early work on reconceiving of nature in terms of events, entitled *The Concept of Nature*, has

³⁹ David Hume, *Of the Standard of Taste, Essays Moral and Political* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1757), 136.

⁴⁰ Sandra Lubarsky, "Living Beauty," in *Keeping the Wild*, ed. George Wuerthner, Eileen Crist, and Tom Butler (Washington D.C.: Island Press, 2014), 190.

traced this long materialist history back to the roots of Western philosophy in general and its Aristotelian influence on the interpretation of modern scientific datum:

The history of the doctrine of matter...is the influence of Greek philosophy on science. That influence has issued in one long misconception of the metaphysical status of natural entities. The entity has been separated from the factor which is the terminus for sense-awareness. It has become the substratum for that factor, and the factor has been degraded into an attribute of the entity.⁴¹

This 'long misconception of the metaphysical status of natural entities' that has separated the entity from the factor which is the terminus of its sense-awareness *is exactly the materialist bifurcation that Whitehead was attempting to address*. The predominant picture of reality that we have inherited from the Enlightenment is a materialist one in which sensory experiences are phenomenological laminates onto the experiences of matter bumping up against matter as it moves around a meaningless cosmos. These are precisely the Aristotelian substances inherited from Greek thought that influenced modern thought. Whitehead's own analysis of this inheritance is as follows:

Aristotle asked the fundamental question, What do we mean by substance? Here the reaction between his philosophy and his logic worked very unfortunately. In his logic, the fundamental type of affirmative proposition is the attribution of a predicate to a subject. Accordingly, amid the many current uses of the term 'substance' which he analyses, he emphasizes its meaning as 'the ultimate substratum which is no longer predicated by anything else. The unquestioned acceptance of the Aristotelian logic has led to an ingrained tendency to postulate substratum for whatever is disclosed in sense-awareness, namely to look below what we are aware of for the substance in the sense of the 'concrete thing.' This is the origin of the modern scientific concept of matter and of ether, namely they are the outcome of this insistent habit of postulation.⁴²

⁴¹ Whitehead, *The Concept of Nature: Tarner Lectures*, 15.

⁴² Whitehead, *The Concept of Nature: Tarner Lectures*, 16-17.

These substances are the smallest bits of reality as conceived of by the modern mind as infected by the Aristotelian logic which attributes to the materials themselves the ‘ultimate substratum which is no longer predicated by anything else.’ Whitehead presses for a move beyond the engagement of this modern reduction by embracing a naturalist metaphysics that is worth consideration if one seeks a life of exuberance for today. Here again, Lubarsky has helpfully observed that: “Where intrinsic value is denied to experience, as it is in Cartesian-Kantian metaphysics, aesthetics (and ethics) contribute nothing to our knowledge of reality.”⁴³ And so, as most philosophers have attempted to contour aesthetics and especially beauty from within the Kantian form of metaphysics that has relegated them to the subjective “eye of the beholder,” it is now crucial to address how Whitehead attributes not only the value of Beauty back into nature, but what this means for our postmodern conception of reality. Whitehead has offered up an alluring picture of a reality-in-motion — this is not the mindless careening of materials throughout an expanding universe, but rather a different conception altogether — one that overcomes the materialist bifurcation of reality and offers us a new picture of a web of relationality in which there is a beautiful, cosmic unification of differences that opens up endless possibility for aliveness and value.

Overcoming the Bifurcation — From Nature to Reality

In the aforementioned work, *The Concept of Nature*, Whitehead began his project of reconceiving of reality not in terms of the substantialist metaphysics of modernity, but in terms of an event-based system which he eventually deemed his ‘philosophy of organism’ in *Process*

⁴³ Lubarsky, "Living Beauty," 191.

and Reality. In *The Concept of Nature*, however, he does not yet venture to speak of reality, but rather first of nature. This places his work in this book in the realm of a philosophy of science, rather than an attempt at a cosmological scheme indicative of modern metaphysics. The first move that Whitehead makes in terms of talking about nature is in terms of attributing the experience of sense-perception back to nature — which was an initial attempt at overcoming the aforementioned Cartesian-Kantian bifurcation. Along these lines, he notes: “The first task of a philosophy of science should be some general classification of the entities disclosed to us in sense perception.”⁴⁴ In this statement, he is showing his cards, if you will. He is attempting to provide a general classification for that which is experienced by human beings in their sense perception. It is an attempt to actually disclose that which modern philosophy only attempted to disclose, but rather ended up cutting off — a deep sense for things-in-themselves — just exactly what is being experienced by subjects. He begins by remarking that he is seeking an ideal that is “The attainment of some unifying concept which will set in assigned relationships within itself all that there is for knowledge, for feeling, and for emotion.”⁴⁵ Here he is already giving a methodological nod to the larger project of his life, which will be not only to classify entities disclosed in personal experience, but also to conceive of some unifying concept that will set in relationships ‘all that there is for knowledge, feeling, and emotion.’ Basically, this is his way of admitting that the larger telos of his work will culminate in some general scheme, again, which he later develops out fully in *Process and Reality*. Here, however, again his efforts are to begin to

⁴⁴ Whitehead, *The Concept of Nature: Tarner Lectures*, 15.

⁴⁵ Whitehead, *The Concept of Nature: Tarner Lectures*, 6.

talk about nature in a new way — one that brings a unity to both the experience of sense-perception and nature itself.

Whitehead, in attempting to parse out the meaning of nature before moving on to reality, reflects that: “Nature is that which we observe in perception through the senses. In this sense-perception we are aware of something which is not thought and which is self-contained for thought.”⁴⁶ What he is addressing here will become his ultimate definition of nature as that which is a whole wherein thought cannot be abstracted from nature itself — which is also the key beginning place of understanding for those attempting to embrace a Whiteheadian perspective. This is not the universe as disclosed by modern materialism. This is a nature that is wild with thought. Thought is a part of a nature that contains within it both sense-perception and thought. The first step for Whitehead is to, in essence, sew nature back together from its modern fragmentation. In this conception, nature begins to present a different picture. It is one in which the whole of nature is *moving* down, in, and through creaturely sense awareness, but also one that presents a novel unification of the whole of the universe in an instantaneous moment of becoming. Along these lines, Whitehead remarks that: “The immediate fact for awareness is the whole occurrence of nature. It is nature as an event present for self-awareness, and essentially passing. There is no holding nature still and looking at it.”⁴⁷ Nature cannot stand still *by its own nature*. It is not something to be caught like a firebug and put in a jar for observation, rather it is a flow to be experienced by the flow itself. If this sounds counterintuitive, it is likely because we have inherited a tradition of thinking that makes sense of things by differentiation — by

⁴⁶ Whitehead, *The Concept of Nature: Tarner Lectures*, 6.

⁴⁷ Whitehead, *The Concept of Nature: Tarner Lectures*, 14.

chopping them up and holding them up to the light for observation. But this is not Whitehead's nature. In Whitehead's nature, the experience of the flow is a part of the flow itself. To reiterate the point I am making here, process philosopher and theologian Roland Faber has put it beautifully:

Whitehead reconstructs nature from the *experience* of nature such that every act of *perceiving* nature constructs the *ground of knowledge* of nature 'in itself.' A 'perceptive event' then constitutes not only a mental phenomenon that in some fashion stands over against nature, but an occurrence *within* nature itself. In its own turn, nature is now released from its mindless condition and is viewed instead as a process in which cognition represents a natural process.⁴⁸

Thus for Whitehead, nature is teeming not only with life-events, but also with a mental phenomenon that is on the inside of nature. This movement of the process of nature is now one in which Whitehead has begun to establish it as a process in which cognition is an emergent development in the history of nature, not a phenomenological laminate that discloses nothing true through sense-perception — and thus cognition can rather be classified as a property of nature itself. In short, nature, for Whitehead, perceives and is always perceiving. This reconstruction of nature from the experience of nature is one in which we not only begin to overcome modern bifurcations, but also begin to experience a new way of conceiving of reality in terms of 'events.'

To drive the point home, Whitehead expands even further upon the bifurcation he is attempting to overcome in *The Concept of Nature* by directly naming it as: "to bifurcate nature

⁴⁸ Roland Faber, *God as Poet of the World: Exploring Process Theologies* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 46-47. In this thesis, references to Faber's earlier work, *God as Poet of the World*, are used to buoy the explanatory dimension of Whitehead's metaphysics, and his more recent works will be subsequently referenced in order to enliven the interpretive thrust of my own neowhiteheadian perspective that is a part of the methodology of this work.

into two divisions, namely into the nature apprehended in awareness and the nature which is the cause of awareness.”⁴⁹ Again here, Faber provides some clarity of insight as to the naming of these two divisions from a Cartesian vantage point in pointing out that: “This separation was fixed both ontologically and in philosophy of science by Descartes’ bifurcation of two substances, the *res extensa* and the *res cognate*; ever since, this distinction has prompted powerful attempts to reduce all that is mental to the material.”⁵⁰ These substances of *res extensa* and *res cognate* of Cartesian conception are precisely what Whitehead has attempted to bring together in his concept of nature. In the bifurcation tradition, logic is employed as a methodology of reflecting on the true nature of reality from *outside* rather than from the *inside*. What Whitehead means by this is that: “The bifurcation theory is an attempt to exhibit natural science as an investigation of the cause of the fact of knowledge. Namely, it is an attempt to exhibit apparent nature as an effluent from the mind because of causal nature.”⁵¹ In the bifurcated line of thinking, there is a nature that is the cause of thought, and the thought realm that is another type of substance, non-physical though it may be. This modern dualism and its subsequent implications are at the root of much of the modern philosophy of science’s task. It is easy to see why Descartes might have gone this direction, especially given what working out a unitive metaphysics would entail for experiencing subjects. Whitehead suspected that this bifurcation remained in part because:

The reason why the bifurcation of nature is always creeping back into scientific philosophy is the extreme difficulty of exhibiting the perceived redness and warmth of

⁴⁹ Whitehead, *The Concept of Nature: Tarner Lectures*, 24.

⁵⁰ Faber, *God as Poet of the World: Exploring Process Theologies*, 46, italics Faber’s.

⁵¹ Whitehead, *The Concept of Nature: Tarner Lectures*, 25.

the fire in one system of relations with the agitated molecules of carbon and oxygen, with the radiant energy from them, and with the various functions of the material body.⁵²

And yet, that is exactly what Whitehead has done in his own concept of nature. In reconceiving of nature by bringing a holism to the two substances of Cartesian bifurcation, Whitehead has offered a way beyond the dualistic trappings of modernity and toward a view which conceives of the whole of reality in a speculatively nondual manner — one which affords those voyaging into Western postmodernity a living philosophy for today.

Imagining Becoming

In the spirit of philosophers Catherine Keller and Anne Daniell's charge to pick up this poststructuralist sense/ability and harmonize it with a sort of postmodern neowhiteheadian cosmology from the introduction to this thesis, this study now turns to examine how poststructuralist thought, when combined with Whiteheadian structures, creates a novel harmonic development directly in and through the complications of postmodernism, and gives forth a potential philosophical methodology that shines a light of prismic reflection into the murkiness and meaninglessness of this time — especially as exemplified in the decline of religion on the whole. One might now wonder: "Is there a self-deconstructing speculative possibility that places its emphasis on its own creative transformation and thus evolution, thereby escaping modern materialism's unifying and totalizing narrational allergy and instead locating itself within poststructuralist critiques of modernity while escaping both its foundationalisms and reductionisms at the same time?" In picking up on the strains of Whiteheadian thinking that

⁵² Whitehead, *The Concept of Nature: Tarner Lectures*, 25.

center around his notion of creative advance, one can achieve just that. Both Catherine Keller's and Roland Faber's antifoundationalist readings of Whitehead offer us a way beyond modern thought so that we might continue in the stream of the inherently de/constructive task of philosophy as employed by Whitehead and thus carry on the tradition of empirical, rational, and speculative inquiry into reality while employing an embrace of the endless flow of creativity in the task itself. Keller related Whitehead to French postmodernism by naming that they both address relativity in different ways. The deconstructionists do so by emphasizing difference — recovering the differences that were lost in totalizing generalizations, and Whiteheadians do so by emphasizing connection, nexus, and relation. In this affirmation, one can realize that thinkers in either camp are not necessarily doing the same work as their thinking ultimately leads in different directions, but also that they do interfere with one another in a significant way.⁵³ This interference is reflective of Whitehead's mantra that there is a process in which the many become one and the one becomes many in his discourse about Creativity as an ultimate principle:

Creativity is the universal of universals characterizing ultimate matter of fact. It is that ultimate principle by which the many, which are the universe disjunctively, become the one actual occasion, which is the universe conjunctively. It lies in the nature of things that the many enter into complex unity.⁵⁴

Whitehead's emphasis here illustrates a way beyond the reductionism of needing difference or unity to be the sole emphasis of a postmodern philosophical methodology. Instead, here Whitehead emphasizes unity over difference, but a type of unitive multiplicity that creates another many of differences in need of yet another harmonic unity. In essence, the difference becomes a unification and that unification becomes another difference. Whitehead's ultimates do

⁵³ Faber, "Being and Becoming I: Modes of Performance," Lecture.

⁵⁴ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 21.

not hold apart epistemology and ontology — rather his scheme does not fit into either camp and thus transcends yet another temptation toward totalizing claims.⁵⁵ Thus, to abstract Whitehead's own principle of creativity as a sort of ultimate which stands in as a propositional metanarrative would be to misplace the nature of Whitehead's own creativity in his development of the notion of Creativity, and thus conjure yet another misplaced concreteness.

Along these lines, Keller rightly names that: "Whitehead thawed out the metaphysical tradition of the West, melting the unchanging, eternal Reality of its Being into the turbulent flow of an endless Becoming. 'Creativity,' as the first principle, cannot constitute a foundation as just defined."⁵⁶ What she is naming here is that Whitehead's articulation of Creativity as an ultimate principle helps process thinkers to avoid the foundationalisms of modernity, while continuing to allow for abstractions, knowing that the abstractions themselves are not final in any sense. Again here, Coleman notes that: "While Alfred North Whitehead is not the originator of the philosophical emphasis of the pervasiveness of change in the world, I find Whitehead's metaphysical articulation of the continuity of change to be helpful for the construction of a postmodern womanist theology."⁵⁷ Here, Coleman in her process-womanist perspective affirms Whiteheadian creativity as central to the construction of her own postmodern perspective, and thus begs a similar call beyond concreteness. Upholding creative transformation is not a foundation upon which to stand, however, but rather in Keller's own words, a ground to stand upon — the kind of literal ground that is made up of "recycled stardust like us, [and] oozes with

⁵⁵ Faber, "System and Noise I: Deconstruction," Lecture.

⁵⁶ Keller and Daniell, *Process and Difference: Between Cosmological and Poststructuralist Postmodernisms*, 10.

⁵⁷ Coleman, "Metaphysics, Metaphor, and Multiplicity," 345.

life-forms. Yet nothing is more sustaining of life than the densely relational, relative stabilities of the spinning earth-ball.”⁵⁸ This grounded, ecological setting for affirming both the relationality of a Whiteheadian methodology of creative cosmology and poststructuralist deconstructive sense/ability through the fleshy, human experience helps one to see how “Process thought writes the connections. Poststructuralism traces the differences.”⁵⁹

Process philosopher and theologian David Ray Griffin has taken an alternative methodological approach in purporting a postmodern Whiteheadian methodology. Firmly within the Hartshornean tradition of process thought, Griffin instead takes Whiteheadians to have created postmodernism, as they have overcome the fragmentations associated with the various modern bifurcations. In his work, he has attempted to create a new holism by which all things are interrelated, which sounds similar to the aforementioned poststructuralist process project, but is noticeably different in its constructive position.⁶⁰ Keller and Faber’s affirmation of both the constructive task of Whiteheadian philosophy, and especially their affinity for the deconstructive elements of poststructuralism, marks a significant difference from Griffin that also aids in the task of understanding Griffin’s option. Roland Faber has noted that:

Because philosophically Griffin does not indeed intend to establish a new worldview capable of integrating all the more important epistemological methodologies [of postmodernism], he is convinced that the future will see the advent of a worldview of holism in which there will no longer be any dualism. Griffin understands this holism as an alternative expression for his ‘postmodern constructive thought.’⁶¹

⁵⁸ Keller and Daniell, *Process and Difference: Between Cosmological and Poststructuralist Postmodernisms*, 13.

⁵⁹ Keller and Daniell, *Process and Difference: Between Cosmological and Poststructuralist Postmodernisms*, 55.

⁶⁰ Faber, “Being and Becoming I: Modes of Performance,” Lecture.

⁶¹ Faber, *God as Poet of the World: Exploring Process Theologies*, 40.

These ‘important epistemological methodologies are precisely those that have emerged in the postmodern landscape, especially including the critiques laid out by poststructuralism. It is my contention that one cannot return to the pre-modern era, nor can they skip the critiques of postmodernism altogether in order to create a new holism, but rather, with the de/constructive Whiteheadians, we must transcend the critiques of postmodernity by addressing them and including them into an overall philosophical methodology. This means that one must discover a nonessentialist reading of Whitehead that is both true to his initial insights and impulse, and relevant to life in the 21st century. Along these lines, Faber continues on in arguing that “Whitehead makes a nonessentialist departure from dependence on fixed, self-evident ‘substances’ and ‘subjects,’ a prioritization of vibrant, living development over the rigidity of system, and a postconstructivist relativization of reason itself as an instrument of reconciliation.”⁶² These qualities, as affirmed by Faber, may lure process thinkers to inhabit an alternative postmodern philosophical methodology that is antiessentialist, nonfoundational, and inherently deconstructive — all while engaging in a form of constructive philosophy and theology. While that may be implied in some sense in Griffin’s constructive attempt, process thinkers like Faber and Keller go farther to allow the deconstructive tendencies of poststructuralism and other postmodern epistemologies to run their courses and integrate them into their perspective. What results is a tantalizing option in the postmodern philosophical landscape — one that Faber eventually names as not solely constructive and not solely deconstructive, but in a creative advance beyond that binary, he calls this methodology “de/

⁶² Faber, *God as Poet of the World: Exploring Process Theologies*, 42.

constructive.” He names this approach in his recent 2014 work, *The Divine Manifold*, by stating that:

Mapping the mystery...by means of the method of *de/construction*, that is, by the *deconstruction* of false unifications into the One, *and* by considering the very possibility of any *construction* of divine reality through language...These movements will not be treated as a problem of analytic philosophy of philosophy of language, but in the horizon of a post-structuralist-process approach.⁶³

His intent here is to bring to bear the de/constructive nature of philosophy (and theology) in its poststructuralist setting, and thus to overcome the temptation toward a Griffinian reductionism on the constructive side and poststructuralist reductive nihilism of meaninglessness on the other. The result here is quite affective — or alluring — in its effect. In following Whitehead, the methodologies advocated for in Faber’s de/constructive emphasis and Keller’s poststructuralist cosmology offer up a philosophical tradition that is faithful to the process tradition, without abstracting another foundation upon which to stand, totalize, and substantialize one’s truth claims. Rather, their offerings invite exciting and creative reflections on poststructuralist critiques and their implications for those desiring to carry Whitehead into the postmodern world, while writing the connections *and* tracing the differences— ones which Griffin does not play with, and thus does not integrate in any significant way into his postmodern process perspective, making Griffin’s the less valuable philosophical option for a contemporary setting looking for connections today.

Finally, here we arrive at the methodological center of this project that attempts a faithfulness to Whitehead’s original vision of speculative philosophy, while integrating the poststructuralist critiques of the modern project a la postmodernity into the process. This vision

⁶³ Faber, *The Divine Manifold*, 29-30, italics Faber’s.

seems to be most true to the tradition of Whitehead. Here, Whitehead expresses this methodological derivation in his own words:

The explanatory purpose of philosophy is often misunderstood. Its business is to explain the emergence of the more abstract things from the more concrete things. It is a complete mistake to ask how concrete particular fact can be built up out of universals. The answer is, in no way. The true philosophic question is, How can concrete fact exhibit entities abstract from itself and yet participated in by its own nature? In other words, philosophy is explanatory of abstraction, and not of concreteness. It is by reason of their instinctive grasp of this ultimate truth that, in spite of much association with arbitrary fancifulness and atavistic mysticism, types of Platonic philosophy retain their abiding appeal; they seek the forms in the facts. Each fact is more than its forms, and each form 'participates' throughout the world of facts. The definiteness of fact is due to its forms; but the individual fact is a creature, and creativity is the ultimate behind all forms, inexplicable by forms, and conditioned by its creatures.⁶⁴

This is a case-in-point that philosophy does not explain concreteness — rather it presupposes it and explains the abstractions.⁶⁵ Thus, the creativity of Whitehead's philosophical methodology is also exemplified in his category of the Ultimate, that is, in his emphasizing of Creativity.

Creativity begs at that heart of reality which is not a generalization, because it is not a form — and nor is it a structure, for it is not structurable. Therefore, in conceptualizing of Creativity in this way, Whitehead escapes the reductionism on both sides — both modernity and postmodernity — in naming that creativity allows structures to happen, it is not another structure. Any philosophic abstraction made is based in activity or actuality.⁶⁶ This Creativity, this Platonic khora of formlessness, allows for a world of becoming structures, to which we shall now turn, in

⁶⁴ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 20.

⁶⁵ Faber, "Being and Becoming II: Event Ontology," Lecture.

⁶⁶ Faber, "Being and Becoming II: Event Ontology," Lecture.

which the universe is “A complex, layered, nested environment of organisms, nexuses, and events, but is neither of them, except in a very special, universal sense.”⁶⁷

Integrating Cosmic Consciousness

Perhaps no awareness has so affected and transformed the postmodern landscape as that of our cosmic consciousness. By this, I mean our awareness of both the vastness and intricacy of our existence as disclosed through the ruminations of cosmologists and theoretical physicists. Through theories around general relativity and quantum mechanics, we now know that: “There are therefore in the universe thousands of billions of billions of billions of planets such as Earth”⁶⁸ on the one hand, and simultaneously on the other, we are finding a reality in which:

An elementary structure of the world is emerging, generated by quantum events, where time and space do not exist. Quantum fields draw together space, time, matter, and light, exchanging information between one event and another. Reality is a network of granular events; the dynamic that connects them is probabilistic; between one event and another, space, time, matter, and energy melt into a cloud of probability.⁶⁹

This growing awareness of our universe has yet to trickle down into popular consciousness in any significant way. If it had, our popular understandings of our world would have shifted in more drastic ways, but alas we are still young in observing our cosmos in many ways, and many of the equations, interpretations, theories, and claims surrounding concepts like quantum gravity are still being worked out. But one thing is to be sure, reality is not quite what it seems. Leading theoretical physicist Carlo Rovelli has written a book of the same title, *Reality is Not What it*

⁶⁷ Roland Faber, *The Becoming of God: Process Theology, Philosophy, and Multireligious Engagement* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017), 44.

⁶⁸ Rovelli, *Seven Brief Lessons on Physics*, 28.

⁶⁹ Rovelli, *Reality Is Not What It Seems: The Journey to Quantum Gravity*, 6.

Seems, and has poetically and thoroughly described modern science and its history of discovery as it applies to our contemporary situation. This growing awareness of our cosmos is affecting the way that we conceive of both reality and ourselves in terms of a couple elements — the integration into our perspective of a continuously expanding universe on the macro level and nexus of interrelated spatio-temporal events on a micro level. These new discoveries are unexaggeratedly revolutionizing our understanding of almost everything in the philosophy of science, and a postmodern concept of reality must reflect these advances in order to be compliant with what we now know of our changing world. This growing picture is one in which we are beginning to see with new eyes the surrational (note, not pre-rational or post-rational) mystery of the nondual cosmos of which we are all a part. Rovelli again reflects here on this scientific mystery beyond mystification:

The world is boundless and iridescent; we want to go and see it. We are immersed in its mystery and in its beauty, and over the horizon there is unexplored territory. The incompleteness and the uncertainty of our knowledge, our precariousness, suspended over the abyss of the immensity of what we don't know, does not render life meaningless: it makes it interesting and precious.⁷⁰

In this vision of reality, our sense-experience does disclose truth to us, but it does not always confirm to us the fullest picture that we are now coming to know. For that, we need an interpretation of the available datum. And lucky for us, this is just what philosopher Alfred North Whitehead was doing at the advent of some of these discoveries in the first half of the 20th century.

⁷⁰ Rovelli, *Reality Is Not What It Seems: The Journey to Quantum Gravity*, 8.

The Events of Processual Reality

At the minute scale of the grains of space, the dance of nature does not take place to the rhythm of the baton of a single orchestral conductor, at a single tempo: every process dances independently with its neighbors, to its own rhythm. The passage of time is internal to the world, born in the world itself in the relationship between quantum events that comprise the world.

— Carlo Rovelli, *Reality Is Not What It Seems*⁷¹

This statement about reality was not made by a philosopher, theologian, or a poet, but rather by the aforementioned theoretical physicist, Carlo Rovelli in 2016. It is significant to note the origin of this poetic reflection on cosmic reality, in part because it grounds the following reflection on events in the observations being made by those within the discipline of physics, not philosophy of science. Although Rovelli lapses into philosophical explorations of science as a well-versed student of the historical development of the discipline of philosophy, what I want to highlight here is his naming of the ‘rhythm of relational events dancing with their neighbors.’ This is strikingly similar to Whitehead’s own conception of events in the early 20th century. It is no secret to those familiar with Whitehead that he conceives of reality in terms of events, and we do need philosophers like him to help us distill what the datum is showing if we want to gain a more accurate picture of the flow of reality. In fact, in the previous exploration of Whitehead’s nature, one can observe something like an event-based reality already taking shape in his thought. What he had yet to develop out fully yet were his categories and the full relationality of the events that he had begun to describe. In statements like this, Whitehead discloses the telos of his project: “Nature is such that there can be no events and no objects without the ingression of

⁷¹ Rovelli, *Seven Brief Lessons on Physics*, 44, italic’s mine.

objects into events.”⁷² Here he is beginning to move toward his reformed subjectivist principle in attributing event-like nature to perceived objects. He notes here that objects are situated in events and not the other way around, and that an “object is the character of the event which is its situation, but it only influences the character of other events through ingression — the relation of situation.”⁷³ Thus, for Whitehead, events display their characteristics as objects of our sense-perception, and through their relational situation, they influence the character of other events.

This leads him to conclude at the end of *The Concept of Nature*, that:

This long discussion brings us to the final conclusion that the concrete facts of nature are events exhibiting a certain structure in their mutual relations and certain characters of their own. The aim of science is to express the relations between their characters in terms of the mutual structural relations between the events thus characterized. The mutual relations between events are both spatial and temporal.⁷⁴

This is exactly the kind of aim expressed by the science of Carlo Rovelli at the outset of this section. Statements like: “There are no longer particles that move in space with the passage of time, but quantum fields whose elementary events happen in spacetime. The world is strange but simple,”⁷⁵ can be found all throughout Rovelli’s work, and the fascination with which he enters the task of theoretical physics is ultimately alluring. But the truth of this beautiful simplicity of an event-based reality is that reality really may not be what it seems to our immediate experience, and so yet further exploration into the nature of events is required in order to help illuminate this radical, empirical statement of reducing reality to events.

⁷² Whitehead, *The Concept of Nature: Tarner Lectures*, 97.

⁷³ Whitehead, *The Concept of Nature: Tarner Lectures*, 85.

⁷⁴ Whitehead, *The Concept of Nature: Tarner Lectures*, 111-112.

⁷⁵ Rovelli, *Reality Is Not What It Seems: The Journey to Quantum Gravity*, 129.

In 1927-1928, Alfred North Whitehead gave a series of lectures on cosmology and philosophy at the Gifford Lectures in Edinburgh, Scotland, which eventually turned into his book *Process and Reality*. In it, Whitehead gives his fullest depiction of his cosmological scheme, which — given his earlier emphasis on the event — became his most in-depth dive into the nature of reality. He does much to delve in to what becomes known as the ‘dipolar’ nature of an event, which means that every event has two parts to it — primordial and consequent, becoming and perishing, physical and mental — and these events become known in his thinking as “actual occasions” or “actual entities” (terms synonymous with event in the Whiteheadian lexicon). In *Process and Reality*, Whitehead makes the following affirmation of events:

‘Actual entities’— also termed ‘actual occasions’ —are the final real things of which the world is made up. There is no going behind actual entities to find anything more real. They differ among themselves: God is an actual entity, and so is the most trivial puff of existence in far-off empty space... The final facts are, all alike, actual entities; and these actual entities are drops of experience, complex and interdependent.⁷⁶

Although Whitehead mentions God in this statement, the concept of God will not be visited until the end of this study. The point here is that these final facts, these events named by Whitehead as actual occasions, are drops of experience, ‘complex and interdependent.’ This complex, interdependent reality consisting of events is a new development in the history of thought — one that makes use of both the classics and the moderns, but also moves beyond them in a significant manner. The claim that reality consists in event-relationships means that all things are in some sense, *experiencing* in their own processes of becoming. This is much less easy to observe of something perceived as stable like a rock than it is a match being blown out, but nonetheless this

⁷⁶ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 18.

is the picture of the world that science continues to reveal to us. Rovelli, picking up on the descriptive conundrum, remarks:

If we look at a stone, it stays still. But if we could see its atoms, we would observe them to be always now here and now there, in ceaseless vibration. Quantum mechanics reveals to us that the more we look at the detail of the world, the less constant it is. The world is not made up of tiny pebbles. It is a world of vibrations, a continuous fluctuation, a microscopic swarming of fleeting microevents.⁷⁷

It is to this atomic — indeed subatomic — perspective that we must turn if we are to see the whole of the cosmos in terms of events; and what we see is that what Whitehead was interpreting in the late 1920's is consonant with the most contemporary developments in quantum mechanics today in 2019. This unstable picture of reality shows forth a reality of motion — a reality of happenings, of experiences, of relationships, and indeed of spatio-temporal events in the process of becoming and perishing. This ephemerality is exactly the world described in Whitehead's universe of creative advance into novelty. Although our bodies and often our experiences present to us a solid, material world like that conceived of in modern philosophy in the line of the Aristotelian tradition, the quantum reality observed in contemporary physics tells a different story. What if we were to consider with both Whitehead and Rovelli that:

Everything that exists is never stable and is nothing but a jump from one interaction to another...Quantum mechanics and experiments with particles have taught us that the world is a continuous, restless swarming of things, a continuous coming to light and disappearance of ephemeral entities. A set of vibrations, as in the switched-on hippie world of the 1960s. A world of happenings, not of things.⁷⁸

Here the casual closure of modern physics meets its end in a fantastical, yet very real world of entangled quantum events, swarming together to create living societies of actual occasions like

⁷⁷ Rovelli, *Reality Is Not What It Seems: The Journey to Quantum Gravity*, 132.

⁷⁸ Rovelli, *Seven Brief Lessons on Physics*, 32-33.

our world, our bodies, and in fact, all that is anything at all. This grand vision once more separates Whitehead's post/modern cosmology from the modern tradition by advocating not for the Cartesian materialism of physical bodies, but rather for the organicism of the relationality of relational events — indeed an alternative form of realism than that of the materialists that is at the heart of the Whiteheadian conception. This reality — the one that presents itself in the form of spatio-temporal events, is one in which events themselves — these tiny drops of experience — are not actual until they have become, and once having become, thus become prehensive datum for subsequent occasions of experience. Along these lines, Whitehead reflects that: “The individual, real facts of the past lie at the base of our immediate experience in the present. They are the reality from which the occasion springs, the reality from which it derives its source of emotion, from which it inherits its purposes, to which it directs its passions.”⁷⁹

A grandiose statement like ‘All of reality is made up of events’ was possible at the time of Whitehead, but now, just under a hundred years later, is really finding its own form. Roland Faber has traced Whitehead's development of thought in his own pursuit of an event-based philosophy of organism, and provides the following analysis. Firstly, he notes that “Whitehead's event theory links general experiential *metaphysics* with the *epistemology* of feeling. Its mediation of the singular and universal interprets the ‘unitexturality of reality’ as an ecological paradigm that not only allows for a *real* knowledge of reality, but also interprets reality itself *as* a cognitive process.”⁸⁰ In this statement, Faber highlights the fact that the first insight of viewing reality in terms of events is not solely its transient or relational qualities, but also its mentality. In

⁷⁹ Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 280.

⁸⁰ Faber, *God as Poet of the World: Exploring Process Theologies*, 58.

creating an entire cosmological scheme that consists of events, Whitehead has united mind and matter once and for all, and the resultant quality is one in which the knowing about reality is also a part of reality itself. As already visited in the section of this study on ‘nature,’ Whitehead first conceived of events in *The Concept of Nature*: “as singular occurrences, with definite spatio-temporal extension, that replace or follow one another or that arbitrarily subdivide a happening with a spatial-temporal extension; they represent, as it were, *spatio-temporal slices* through the world.”⁸¹ This is not the materialism attributed to the Cartesian tradition, but rather an initial externalizing of these characterizing event-structures in their spatio-temporal regions throughout the cosmos. Later, Whitehead went further to develop his theory of events in *Science and the Modern World* (1925) as “an *inner unity*, that is, no longer as an arbitrary spatio-temporal slice that actualizes a character, but as an *organism* ‘atom’ of nature, as *unity of assimilating becoming* (*prehensive unity*), but simultaneously also as one *atomic unity* among many others.”⁸² Here, one can observe the seminal ‘inner unity’ of the Whiteheadian conception of an event as it continued to develop toward its final forms in *Process and Reality* (1929), *Adventures of Ideas* (1933), and later, in his essay, *Immortality* (1941). Here, events are seen as organisms in and of themselves — as tiny unities of becoming that bring together both the past and future as possibility in a concrescent coming together of potential from past realizations. Understanding this with Faber’s own description is again helpful here:

In the cosmology of *Process and Reality* (1929), this organic concept leads to a significant consequence, namely, to a distinction *within* the concepts of ‘event’ and ‘object.’ Because events represent internal decisions of unity between possibilities, Whitehead now distinguishes between the *event as the becoming* of the organic unity of

⁸¹ Faber, *God as Poet of the World: Exploring Process Theologies*, 59.

⁸² Faber, *God as Poet of the World: Exploring Process Theologies*, 59.

an ‘atom,’ on the one hand, and *event as a change* within the relational unity of many ‘atoms’ on the other. Whitehead accords *indivisible* unity only to microcosmic unities of becoming, which form from relations with other unities of becoming; they can perish, but never change. He calls this event ‘actual entity.’⁸³

This distinction is important and not to be missed if the concept of Whitehead’s event is to be understood — namely, events are ‘microcosmic unities of becoming’ that participate in various forms of becoming as they relate to one another to form relations of constancy or changeability, but that does not change the fact that these microscopic unities of becoming make up all other relations. These larger nexus of becoming will be explored later when living societies are addressed, but for now, what can be seen is that events are unities beneath structures. Eventually:

In Whitehead’s article ‘Immortality’ (1941)...he distinguishes between the aura of events (actual entities), on the one hand, and that of objects (structures), on the other, by juxtaposing them as *abstractions* from the *one concrete* universe...the event world is essentially the ‘world of activity’; it is creative, actual, finite, and temporal. The object world by contrast is essentially the ‘world of values’; it is systematic, potential, infinite, and eternal. Whitehead’s final position was to view events as *creative happenings* and objects as *value settings for decisions*.⁸⁴

In naming these two sides of reality, Whitehead continued to further develop out his understanding of events in a nondual manner. He eventually moved toward viewing events in terms of the creative happenings of the world-of-becoming, and to name events as the objectified givenness of the world of causal efficacy — that is, the static, unchanging world of fact having already become. Thus, it may be stated here that Whitehead’s final world of events is ultimately a creative world of becoming. It is not a world of beings, but of becomings — of happenings. The universe comprised of these tiny drops of experience is the cosmic adventure of an expanding reality. This is the world observed as yet by quantum physicists, this is the world

⁸³ Faber, *God as Poet of the World: Exploring Process Theologies*, 61, italics Faber’s.

⁸⁴ Faber, *God as Poet of the World: Exploring Process Theologies*, 62, italics Faber’s.

confirmed thus far by cosmologists and told in the stories of Big History. Zoomed out, the universe is a macroscopic society of societies of societies of events on the move. Zoomed in, it is a leaping and brimming quantum world of event-relations. When this adventurous, eventual vision is integrated into ones perspective, it opens up a world of possibilities for thinking about the universe as essentially creative.

Life in Motion — Creativity

Whitehead has thus described for his audience just how: “Spontaneity, originality of decision, belongs to the essence of each actual occasion. It is the supreme expression of individuality: its conformal subjective form is the freedom of enjoyment derived from the enjoyment of freedom. Freshness, zest, and the extra keenness of intensity arise from it.”⁸⁵ This essence of each actual occasion helps highlight just how the adventure of becoming can be embraced in order to heighten ones experience of freedom, freshness, and zest for life. Life moves forward in the act of expressing creativity in its own creaturely becoming. It is for enjoyment that creativity functions. This emphasis on creativity sets Whiteheadians apart from other comparative schools of thought as — creativity *is*, in a very real sense, the ‘process’ of process philosophy. This principle of creativity, Faber notes, is the “*ground* of events and...the *ultimate principle* of cosmology, answering the most fundamental question of ‘why,’ namely, why there is something rather than nothing...Creativity refers to the *actus essendi*, which focuses, to be sure, not on the *persistence* of that which is (substantialist danger); instead as the

⁸⁵ Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 258.

activity of becoming it focuses on the *arising and perishing* of events.”⁸⁶ This creative impulse is shared in common by all process philosophers, and it is the very reason that those who conceive of the world in terms of events have merit to do so. Reality is something that is always happening. This is why Whitehead has named the most real components of reality as not only ‘events’ or ‘actual entities,’ but also as ‘actual occasions.’ Think about it for a moment. A special occasion that you might attend in terms of something like an evening out is a sort of happening — it is momentary, but is also full of flow — it is an aesthetic event that also becomes and perishes. These sorts of experiences are what constitutes reality in Whitehead’s cosmos. In fact, he goes as far as to say that “Apart from the experiences of subjects there is nothing, nothing, nothing, bare nothingness.”⁸⁷ This all-inclusive subjectivity is the occasion of the universe — a universe of events where Creativity is the ultimate principle of novelty.

This Creativity in Whitehead functions in a couple of manners important to note here — namely as active unity and receptive continuity. Here, again Faber describes this twofold nature of Creativity in naming: “Creativity as the *active* unity of the self-renewal of the universe guarantees that its unity does not become rigid and that it is real only as *process*...Creativity as the *receptive* continuity of communication guarantees that the universe remains the *same* (or remains *itself*) within the process.”⁸⁸ In this way, Creativity acts as the ground for becoming — not in the foundationalist ground rebuked by Keller, but as a sort of fertile soil for becoming. In this sense, Creativity does not exist, nor does it act as a force, but rather as a principle by which the becoming reality of events become one and enter back into another creative exchange.

⁸⁶ Faber, *God as Poet of the World: Exploring Process Theologies*, 76, italics Faber’s.

⁸⁷ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 167.

⁸⁸ Faber, *God as Poet of the World: Exploring Process Theologies*, 78, italics Faber’s.

Whitehead himself calls Creativity the “ultimate matter of fact” and the “principle of novelty” which moves things forward in what he refers to as the “creative advance” when used to describe to each novel situation in which it is applied.⁸⁹ This ‘creative advance into novelty’ is another way to describe Whitehead’s cosmos of events, one that more thoroughly describes the very heart of Whitehead’s universe. If the minutiae of endlessly creative actual occasions is applied to the macroscopic view of the Universe as One, then one must apply this creative advance to the whole, not only to human life. To participate in the universe of events, this means that all “events are involved in somehow, a prehensive transmitting and feeling of their being in the world.”⁹⁰ This entangled universe of feeling-events beholden to their subjective experience in a processual creative advance of relationality are, at the very least, woven together in this process. All events are in some way a feeling of the feelings of others.⁹¹ This is only a shadow or hint of the cosmic compassion that we will come to know more fully in subsequent exploration. For now, let us reflect on the creative, occasional, motive universe of events described both by contemporary quantum theory and by Whitehead’s philosophy of organism. They are a sort of ground from which to reflect on the adventure of the universe — this incessant becoming which comprises the very tapestry of our relative existence.

⁸⁹ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 21.

⁹⁰ Faber, *The Becoming of God: Process Theology, Philosophy, and Multireligious Engagement*, 28.

⁹¹ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 118.

The Tragic Beauty of Ephemerality

At this juncture, affirming the adventure of the cosmos is a way to embrace a couple of Whiteheadian ideals. Firstly, that the universe is still expanding — still moving forward, still evolving. This is the Whiteheadian embrace of the creative advance of the universe. And secondly, this cosmic adventure is especially seen in the microcosmic events of nature that make up the fabric of this expanding universe. These subjective experiences, or ‘actual occasions’ are a way to talk about the whole of the perpetually perishing cosmos. One may be wondering at this point just what exactly the value is of a cosmology such as that laid out by Whitehead? Well, this affirmation of an nonfoundationalist, antiessentialist, de/constructive reality offers us a sort of interpretive metapoetic cosmology that is inherently nondual — nondual in that it creates for us a way beyond the bifurcations and trappings of modern materialism, and lures us toward a perspective of reality which aligns with what we observe in the field of quantum theory, bringing mind and matter together in a new way. The highest value of such a system, Whitehead names as Beauty. Yes, this is the Beauty of the ancients, the inherent quality in all that becomes. In fact, for Whitehead, “Beauty is a wider, more fundamental notion than truth,”⁹² which will be returned to in a moment. For our purposes here, it needs to be said that this Beauty which Whitehead names as the highest value in nature, is the very product of the relations between the subjective forms of the events themselves. In essence, it is the aim of every actual occasion. Here, Whitehead confirms this notion in *Adventures of Ideas*, in saying: “Beauty is the mutual adaptation of the several factors in an occasion of experience. Thus in its primary sense Beauty is a quality which

⁹² Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 265.

finds its exemplification in actual occasions.”⁹³ Here, Beauty can be seen as the resultant product of ephemerality — for, should there have been only creative flow, no value would ever be actually achieved; and if there were only stubborn fact, there would be no advent of novelty, and thus no realization of Beauty. This evanescent quality to Beauty, the fact that it appears and is gone — only to appear again — helps make it what it is. In this sense, there is no ultimate telos to Whitehead’s world in process, as in the omega point of someone like Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, but rather there is always a multiplicity of self-realizing values in the relationships between the events themselves and in their individual self-realizations. They must ‘become’ in order to achieve some level of Beauty. Steve Odin’s latest work, *Tragic Beauty in Whitehead and Japanese Aesthetics*, puts forth a complimentary thesis, in saying that: “Whitehead’s process metaphysics attains to its consummation in an aesthetics of beauty as perishability summed up by his vision of tragic beauty . . . a poetics of evanescence that celebrates the transience of aesthetic experience and the ephemerality of beauty.”⁹⁴ This, in Whiteheadian terms, is called the embrace of a cosmology of aesthetic satisfaction, in which the widest aim of every event is a certain level of Beauty. It is a Beauty on the move.

This ephemeral, aesthetic realization of Beauty obviously contains within its ultimate scheme repercussions when conceptualizing something like Truth. For what can be seen is that Truth itself is also a process. Truth, in Whitehead’s common-sense correspondence tradition, would be to articulate some quality about the world of causal efficacy having already become that corresponds with its history of fact. Thus, Truth is a component of the world, but as

⁹³ Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 252.

⁹⁴ Steve Odin, *Tragic Beauty in Whitehead and Japanese Aesthetics* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016), xv.

Whitehead already alluded to, it is in a narrower sense than the wider value of Beauty. Along this theme, Whitehead remarks: “Truth has a narrower meaning in two ways. First, Truth, in any important sense, merely concerns the relations of Appearance to Reality. But in the second place the notion of ‘conformation’ in the case of Truth is narrower than that in the case of Beauty. For the truth relation requires that the two relata have some factor in common.”⁹⁵ This relationship between Beauty and Truth can cause concern for the modernist mind in search for some rational path toward objective Truth. However, in Whitehead’s world of quantum events in which each moment of becoming has a valuable aesthetic satisfaction in and of itself, we begin to gain a grander picture of a Truth-in-motion — which includes religious truth, cultural truth, scientific truth, etc. — of a Truth that is a smaller component of the Beauty-full self-realization of an ever-awakening cosmos that continues to flow into ever-novel realizations of Beauty. This is the value of the adventure of the Universe. It is tragic in the sense of its passing, but it is Beauty-full in its realization. In fact, this conception is even more Beauty-full than if the world was simply a matter of physical entities imposing themselves upon physical entities, which in Whitehead’s philosophy of aesthetic satisfaction would be a meaningless world. However, if Whitehead’s Beauty is the actual resultant of occasions with their remarkably rich and intensive conflicting realizations — ones that pass as soon as they are attained — it is possible that this realization is the birth pangs of the harmonic form of Peace that Whitehead comes to suggest in his more tragic form of Beauty. This Peace has a direct correlation to both the aforementioned tragedy (ephemerality), and Beauty, as exemplified in these quotes from Whitehead’s later work:

Peace is the understanding of tragedy, and at the same time its preservation...

⁹⁵ Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 265.

Amid the passing of so much beauty . . . Peace is the intuition of permanence...it sees the tragedy as a living agent persuading the world to aim at fineness beyond the faded level of surrounding fact.⁹⁶

Thus it must be noted that this appeal to inhabit Whitehead's 'tragic Beauty' as a way toward a life of exuberance beyond physicalism is not a call to some naive form of aesthetic awareness. It is rather a call to enflesh a way of being in the world that subverts any attempt to render the world meaningless in its perpetual perishing, which includes creaturely suffering, and rather embraces its evolving nature as one that is full of passing Beauty. Odin again sums this up well in saying:

While harmony is sufficient for the minor form of beauty, elements of discord, dissonance, and disharmony can result in the major form of beauty when entered as patterned harmonic contrasts, instead of being dismissed through negative prehension as incompatible for creative synthesis in an aesthetic occasion of experience.⁹⁷

And so, we have moved from Beauty to Peace in a world of quantum events that exist for their own aesthetic self-realizations. Here, the universe can now be fully conceived of as a beautiful advance — a cosmos of events in process, complex and interrelated, one whose aim in every moment of becoming is for the realization of some harmonic Beauty in the perishing, a patterning of contrasts which comprise our entangled world. This observation leads us to a unitive understanding of the One cosmos, which is itself a multiplicity of creative syntheses of becoming toward a Harmony of Harmonies — and perhaps a Peace that passes (through) all prehensions.

⁹⁶ Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 286.

⁹⁷ Odin, *Tragic Beauty in Whitehead and Japanese Aesthetics*, 62.

For an occasion to come into being there always has to be some level of harmony. If there was no harmony, there would be no reality — there can be no occasion of experience without a type unification. And, what is a unification other than something akin to a musical interval? A reality made up of these types of events is like a grand symphony. Some of its movements contain minor intervals, some major. All notes played are some form of harmonic contrasts. All events are both aiming at and achieving a certain level of Beauty. This is the adventure of the universe as one — careening into ever-novel realizations of Beauty and complexity. This flow is the reality in every moment of cosmic becoming, just as it is in the minutia of events as tiny drops of experience. The cosmic refrain bellowing throughout the ages is the creative song of the harmonic contrasts of reality whose melody achieves the sense of Peace — the Peace of realized Beauty — a Peace that trusts in Beauty’s efficacy. Whitehead said that: “Peace is primarily a trust in the efficacy of Beauty...the trust in the self-justification of Beauty introduces faith where reason fails to reveal the details.”⁹⁸ It is this cosmic tune that plays incessantly, and that creates a universe such as that so melodically described here by Rovelli as consisting of:

A handful of types of elementary particles, which vibrate and fluctuate constantly between existence and nonexistence and swarm in space, even when it seems that there is nothing there, combine together to infinity like the letters of a cosmic alphabet to tell the immense history of galaxies: of the innumerable stars; of sunlight; of mountains, woods, and fields of grain; of the smiling faces of the young at parties; and of the night sky studded with stars.⁹⁹

This universe of events is the one in which we all live and move and have our becoming. We too are instruments in this cosmic orchestra of happenings, realizing levels of Beauty in our every moment of existence.

⁹⁸ Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 285.

⁹⁹ Rovelli, *Seven Brief Lessons on Physics*, 38.

Chapter III: The Nest of Becoming — The Emerging Personhood of Nature

Actuality [is] in its essence a process. This process involves a physical side which is the perishing of the past as it transforms itself into a new creation. It also involves a mental side which is the Soul entertaining ideas. The Soul thereby by synthesis creates a new fact which is the Appearance woven out of the old and the new — a compound of reception and anticipation, which in its turn passes into the future. The final synthesis of these three complexes is the end to which its indwelling Eros urges the soul.

— Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*¹⁰⁰

Whitehead's philosophy of organism has put forth a thesis of cosmic proportions. It has overcome the modern bifurcations seen in the realm of philosophy of science, and has offered up a cosmology of the event — a full embrace of creative advance into ever-novel realizations of Beauty. In its essence, reality is a nest of becoming. But, one might wonder at this point what the repercussions of these ideas are for the conceptualization of personhood, or what has historically been deemed as the human Soul. It is to this question that this section now turns, and attempts to engage through discussions around a process-approach to not only the Soul, but also what role this reframing of the Soul can play in moving one toward an embodied life-posture. These will be questions of existence, of being, and of the value of life. The human being is the very place where the universe becomes conscious to mirror itself to itself. It should be implied at this point that Whitehead's creative process prioritizes becoming over being. In fact, it could be said that being occurs only in a nest of becoming. In reality, being happens only in concrete acts of becoming without end — and only when we awaken to this can we begin to see that we live as part of an infinite universe of becoming. There is a meaningfulness to this becoming as a purpose in itself, which is in this sense a presymbolic realization not yet used for any kind of structural

¹⁰⁰ Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 275, italics mine.

integrity or social power dynamics.¹⁰¹ This universe as a nest of becoming is one in which, as

Roland Faber has noted:

An event 'is not' (does not exist) as long as it happens (becomes). When it has happened, it 'is', but, at the same time, 'is not' anymore, that is, it has ceased to become. The 'reality' of an event demonstrates a profound paradox: its reality of becoming does not exist as fact as long as it is actually happening; its facticity presupposes that its becoming has passed.¹⁰²

This 'becoming reality' begins here to push at a thoroughly nondual conceptualization of the world. This paradox at the heart of the reality of an event in its becoming is that it is not actual in its facticity until it has become, but it is also real in its becoming. The world that has become is in essence, no longer becoming, and is thus presented as a proposition for feeling anew and thus as actual. This world-having-become is always the world as inherited in our immediate experience, but it is the world of creativity — of perpetual becoming — to which we must look in order to conceive of something like the human Soul.

Whitehead noted that: "It belongs to the nature of a 'being' that it is a potential for every 'becoming'...*how* an actual entity becomes constitutes *what* an actual entity is. This principle [the reformed subjectivist principle] states that the *being* of a *res vera* is constituted by its 'becoming'...Process is the becoming of experience."¹⁰³ Here it can be seen that, for Whitehead, one's being is not the actualization of the process having already become — as in a human body, for instance — but rather that the being of an actual occasion (which, remember, is the smallest bit of reality) is constituted by its becoming — or, in other words, how it continues on in its

¹⁰¹ Faber, "System and Noise I: Deconstruction," Lecture.

¹⁰² Faber, *The Becoming of God: Process Theology, Philosophy, and Multireligious Engagement*, 21.

¹⁰³ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 166, italics Whitehead's.

experience. This is an initially radical reframing of what might be meant by the concept of 'being.' This means the physical body, as a society of past events that have already become actualized, do not in-and-of-themselves constitute ones being, but rather it is how the entity continues on in its process of becoming that creates a process in which this discussion around being can be had. Faber here parses out Whiteheadian becoming in three phases:

In its open dipolarity, a subject 'becomes' in three phases. First, it preposits itself ideally in its becoming (as the simple possibility of its arising); second, it aims at itself in its becoming by collecting its past (actualizes its immediacy) in order, finally and third, to transcend itself in its self-acquisition (to become an object, to lose its immediacy) and in so doing to be 'present' in other subjects (to act causally without being self-present).¹⁰⁴

This threefold nature of subjective becoming is one that helps clarify Whitehead's emphasis on becoming over being and the relationship between the two framings. Here it can be seen that the movement from prepositing becoming toward objectification is one in which the objectification of the event-having-become (its spatiotemporal expression) helps the objective achievement be present in a meaningful way in the experiences of other subjects. However, perhaps there is even more said in Faber's final affirmation from the above quote that is revealing of Whiteheadian becoming. The casual activity of the event-having-become objectified is one in which the immediacy of selfhood is not present in this causality! That implies that for life to continue to be alive, it cannot consist of objects-having-become, but rather of the universe of becoming in which being is constituted by the happenings of reality. For, as poet Ralph Waldo Emerson once put so beautifully: "In nature every moment is new; the past is always swallowed and forgotten; the coming only is sacred."¹⁰⁵ Thus, it can be affirmed here, with Whitehead, that the nest of

¹⁰⁴ Faber, *God as Poet of the World: Exploring Process Theologies*, 52.

¹⁰⁵ John F. Haught, *The New Cosmic Story: Inside Our Awakening Universe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), 27.

becoming is the world of reality, and that this brimming, advancing cosmos is full of being insomuch as becoming is what constitutes being. Living things must continually be on the move, for, as Rovelli also put so strikingly: “A living organism is a system that continually re-forms itself in order to remain itself, interacting ceaselessly with the external world. Of such organisms, only those continue to exist that are more efficient at doing so, and therefore living organisms manifest properties that have suited them for survival.”¹⁰⁶ Life consists of organisms that are in a continual process of reformation. This is the truth of evolution and emergence, this is the engine of existence — of a ceaseless cooperation and relationality in which the cosmos is alive insomuch as it continues to *become*.

On Relationality

The current picture of reality as passed down through scientific observation and as mentioned in the first section of this study is one in which reality is deeply interrelated — or entangled as quantum theorists will often say. We have already seen with quantum theorist Carlo Rovelli, that: “The world of existent things is reduced to a realm of possible interactions. Reality is reduced to interaction. Reality is reduced to relation.”¹⁰⁷ But what exactly this means for the emergence of living things cannot fully be developed until quantum relationality is better understood. So, before this study turns to evolution and emergence, it must deal with what relationality means on a quantum level. Rovelli, in his work, *Reality Is Not What It Seems*, notes that “Electrons don’t always exist. They exist when they interact. They materialize in a place

¹⁰⁶ Rovelli, *Reality Is Not What It Seems: The Journey to Quantum Gravity*, 255.

¹⁰⁷ Rovelli, *Reality Is Not What It Seems: The Journey to Quantum Gravity*, 135.

when they collide with something else. The ‘quantum leaps’ from one orbit to another constitute their way of being real: an electron is a combination of leaps from one interaction to another.”¹⁰⁸

Thus, what he is outlining here is that the category of existence is really the appearance of an interaction — so in a sense, nothing materializes unless it is interacting. Whitehead would go as far as to say that each event is also this kind of interaction — a unification — a process of concrescence — a coming together. For Rovelli, relationism and probability become the two staples of quantum mechanics post-Dirac’s discoveries.¹⁰⁹ I want to draw a strong connection here between these two principles and the Whiteheadian terms relationality and possibility. For both Rovelli and Whitehead, reality cannot exist without these two principles, and it is the interaction of the world of presentational immediacy (possibility) and causal efficacy (one mode of relationality) that come together to create real happenings — which are the events of nature.

Thus a universe that contains ‘things’ in them is a universe not only of creative advance, but of relationality. For, “In the world described by quantum mechanics, there is no reality except in the *relations* between physical systems. It isn’t *things* that enter into *relations*, but rather *relations* that ground to the notion of *thing*. The world of quantum mechanics is not a world of objects: it is a world of events.”¹¹⁰ Thus, just as the aforementioned becoming constitutes being in process thought, so also do relations constitute things — things which are themselves events. It is in their relations that they have their beings, so to speak. These relations are the very grounding connectivity in which all beings find their becomings. Catherine Keller has noted the

¹⁰⁸ Rovelli, *Reality Is Not What It Seems: The Journey to Quantum Gravity*, 119-120.

¹⁰⁹ Rovelli, *Reality Is Not What It Seems: The Journey to Quantum Gravity*, 123.

¹¹⁰ Rovelli, *Reality Is Not What It Seems: The Journey to Quantum Gravity*, 135, italics Rovelli’s.

‘spooky’ element of the relational entanglement of this quantum mode in her book *Cloud of the Impossible*, in which she reflects on the nature of quantum unknowing:

The apophatic affect we are tracing...whether more akin to pain, wonder, or sheer puzzlement — remains still sharp among leading physicists...Physics addresses only things we can measure. Limiting the claim of physics to descriptions of our own measurements, to accounts of what it is we can predictably know, establishes a clear boundary between epistemology and ‘reality.’¹¹¹

Here, she is creating an interpretive scenario in which she not only admits her own bewilderment at quantum mechanics, but also hits at the heart of the epistemological task of ‘knowing’ as it pertains to speculation about reality. What can be affirmed here is that the application of current quantum theory about the inherent relational quality of our universe is indeed one which spurs us on in continual wonder. It doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t attempt to talk about how we can reconcile general relativity and quantum mechanics, but it is at least a concession that the picture we have right now is exactly that — the picture we have right now. It is not the final picture, but it is at least one in which: “If...the experiential process itself represents a natural process, and if, in a reverse fashion, nature itself, rather than being mindless, is itself a cognitive process, what emerges is a new paradigm of nature as an *organic network of relationships*.”¹¹² This organic philosophy heretofore developed is one in which cognition is a quality of the process itself, a process of relationality and probability. Rovelli has once more placed all of these things in a helpful statement about the nature of things:

Quantum mechanics teaches us not to think about the world in terms of ‘things’ that are in this or that state but in terms of ‘processes’ instead. A *process* is the passage from one interaction to another. The properties of ‘things’ manifest themselves in a *granular*

¹¹¹ Catherine Keller, *Cloud of the Impossible: Negative Theology and Planetary Entanglement* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2015), 134-135.

¹¹² Faber, *God as Poet of the World: Exploring Process Theologies*, 47, italics Faber’s.

manner only in the moment of interaction — that is to say, at the edges of the processes — and are such only in *relation* to other things. They cannot be predicted in an unequivocal way, but only in a *probabilistic* one.”¹¹³

Granularity (eventuality), indeterminacy (possibility), and entangled energy (relationality) are the world-picture that we have received from quantum theorists, and it is also the world-picture as developed in Whitehead’s philosophy of organism. Thus, as we explore this world of continual becoming, it must be noted that it really can be said here that *interaction is everything*, which is, of course, another way to say that relationships are everything.

Toward Humanity — Evolution and Emergence

Relationships produce reality — and the manifold flow of reality has produced life as a part of that same cosmic process. The question of the arrival of human life in the cosmic story is a recent one, as 13.8 billion years of cosmic emergence has been the setting in which human beings have arisen only recently in the grand scheme of things. Soon, we will ask with Keller:

What generically distinguishes us as a species? (Language, intellect, spirit, politics, the ability to ask these questions or to sneer at them...the question is premature, and stale.) I am asking: how do we unfold ourselves? How do we compose ourselves out of the folds, human or not, that already enfold us?...But then how do we mark our difference from other humans no less than from all the nonhumans? *If the fold is the relation, it is also the difference.*¹¹⁴

Just what differentiates us from other entities will be discussed here briefly, but before we move that direction, its important to first place human beings back in nature — as a part of the flow of reality. Avoiding the fear of evolution that inhabits many Western religious minds (which

¹¹³ Rovelli, *Reality Is Not What It Seems: The Journey to Quantum Gravity*, 137, italics Rovelli’s.

¹¹⁴ Keller, *Cloud of the Impossible: Negative Theology and Planetary Entanglement*, 170, italics Keller’s.

actually functions more often as a fear of change than it does a fear of science), it's crucial here to have a discussion around evolution and change. Firstly, evolutionary process can be described as having three main components: "random changes in natural history and heritable genetic patterns; the impersonal 'law' of natural selection; and a vast amount of time. The cosmic process uses this evolutionary recipe to cook up all the countless forms of life, including our own species, thrusting us into a life-world that has been thriving quite well without us."¹¹⁵ This Darwinian account of evolution is fairly straight-forward — it is a process by which changes occur in nature over time. What this means in terms of explaining the many phenomena of evolution is chronicled by philosopher John B. Cobb Jr. in this short passage:

The picture that emerged and that still dominates the standard explanation of evolution to the public is somewhat as follows. Individual genes have the characteristics once attributed to atoms. They are basically self-contained, and any influence by their environment could be neglected. These genes generally reproduce themselves exactly, but occasionally there are random changes not affected by their cellular or organismic environment. These changes affect the phenotype of the organism in which they occur, and on the rare occasion on which they enable the organism to adapt more successfully to its environment, the organism survives longer and reproduces more. The changed or new gene is then transmitted to a larger portion of the next generation. Thus a process that involves no purposeful activity, indeed no subjectivity of any kind, explains the course of evolution.¹¹⁶

Cobb later reflects on the materialist bent in this interpretation of the randomness of evolution, but nonetheless, it does describe the predominant picture of environmental change as articulated by evolutionary biology. Eventually, Cobb goes on to say that "Whiteheadians speculate, in light of the continuity that evolutionary thinking emphasizes, that a telic element characterizes cells

¹¹⁵ Haught, *The New Cosmic Story: Inside Our Awakening Universe*, 31.

¹¹⁶ John B. Cobb, *Back to Darwin: A Richer Account of Evolution* (Cambridge: International Society for Science and Religion, 2009), 216.

and even quanta, and all the organisms in between. Indeed, process thinkers see the world as made up of organisms interacting with one another rather than of matter in motion.”¹¹⁷

Placing this conversation about evolutionary change in the context of Whitehead’s concurring ‘events,’ it’s important to note that, for Whiteheadians, “The entirety of evolution is in fact a development of *structures of repetition* of objects, that is, of forms, structures, and patterns that are borne by event nexuses. Whitehead refers to any nexus that actualizes organization as a ‘society’ of events.”¹¹⁸ These societies of Whiteheadian conception become a way for process thinkers to talk about the way in which the structures that arise in evolution give rise to various event-combinations which become lifeforms. These teleologically bereft combinations of the infinite dance of relations can help us to begin to understand cosmic emergence in such a way that we might experience ourselves as a part of this natural world in which living societies of actual occasions arise. Evolution is thus the term that is used to describe this cosmic process in terms of its planetary environmental processes that eventually became hospitable to the development of life — and life always changes by definition. This evolutionary process’ cosmic setting can be described as follows:

Whitehead distinguishes essentially four evolutive stages of events and societies. (1) Events of *empty space*...(2) Events as moments in the *life histories of nonliving organisms*...(3) Events as moments in the *life history of living organisms*...(4) Events as moments in the *life history of enduring objects with conscious cognition*.¹¹⁹

This could be considered a macro-evolutionary view from a process perspective. Cosmic events progress by moving through stages on their way toward becoming societies (organized nexus).

¹¹⁷ Cobb, *Back to Darwin: A Richer Account of Evolution*, 220.

¹¹⁸ Faber, *God as Poet of the World: Exploring Process Theologies*, 73, italics Faber’s.

¹¹⁹ Faber, *God as Poet of the World: Exploring Process Theologies*, 73-74, italics Faber’s.

Here, the road toward the development of conscious cognition can already begin to be traced, and thus, the road toward the development of humanity within the cosmic flow. Here the telic element alluded to by Cobb is contrasted with Faber's articulation of the goal of evolution — precisely in that: “The (goal) of evolution is not order, not some final condition or state, but the ‘chaos’ of life and vitality, that is, the process itself (in the universal singular). The *motor* of this evolutive movement is *novelty and life*.”¹²⁰

The telic element in evolution is the motor itself — the long draw of the cosmos toward novelty and life, not toward the ultimate culmination of some omega point — but rather, what is telic is the self-realizing process of nature's beautiful advance toward ever-novel expressions of Beauty, of which the complexity of diverse lifeforms are realizations. In this process-account of evolution, Whiteheadians distance themselves from Darwinians mainly by understanding evolution not as an arbitrary process of selection, but as a process of seeking *more intense realizations*,

And thus as a phenomenon whose teleological character derives from the fundamental notion of self-worth inherent in all that is real. At the same time, however, he distances himself from evolutionary optimism of the sort inhering within teleological conceptions — such as that of Teilhard de Chardin or vitalism — by not acknowledging any macrocosmic teleology. The order of the world is aesthetic precisely because it develops without any goal (albeit never without meaning)¹²¹

This desubstantializing of evolution is an “aim at self-transcendence,”¹²² as Faber has called it, not at Darwinian self-preservation, but rather self-intensity. This sort of Whiteheadian self-transcendence is an invitation to the titular “adventure of becoming” of this project. It looks

¹²⁰ Faber, *God as Poet of the World: Exploring Process Theologies*, 74, italics Faber's.

¹²¹ Faber, *God as Poet of the World: Exploring Process Theologies*, 75.

¹²² Faber, *God as Poet of the World: Exploring Process Theologies*, 75.

toward a posture of life that one may take in terms of how to live — to honor the creative advance of our momentary days, and to seek new forms of self-intensity in a relational framework. Here, the self no longer pines as the hyper-individualistic identity inherited from modernity, but rather, in its unique web of relations, awakens to its connections for the sake of mutual transformation. This begs at the religious dimension of one's life, which is the heart of the third section of this study.

Some final comments on 'emergence' are needed here in order to bring the discussion around evolution as it pertains to this study to a close. In his co-edited volume, *The Re-emergence of Emergence*, process philosopher Philip Clayton has put forth el-Hani and Pereira's fourfold definition of emergence as a way of understanding the emergentist hypothesis:

1. *Ontological physicalism*: All that exists in the space-time world are the basic particles recognized by physics and their aggregates.
2. *Property emergence*: When aggregates of material particles attain an appropriate level of organizational complexity, genuinely novel properties emerge in these complex systems.
3. *The irreducibility of emergence*: Emergent properties are irreducible to, and unpredictable from, the lower-level phenomena from which they emerge.
4. *Downward causation*: Higher-level entities causally affect their lower-level constituents.¹²³

This hypothesis is a way to describe how, in the evolutionary process of spatio-temporal events, higher-level entities with emergent properties such as sight or consciousness have come, through the evolutionary process, to exhibit those qualities. Emergence cannot be philosophically equated with evolution, however, but Lynn J. Rothschild, a NASA evolutionary biologist, has shown in her own research how “for emergence to occur there must be hierarchy and the inability to

¹²³ Philip Clayton and Paul Davies, *The Re-emergence of Emergence: The Emergentist Hypothesis from Science to Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 2, italics Clayton and Davies'.

predict a higher-level function based on its components. Evolutionary innovations may satisfy these criteria.”¹²⁴ She goes on to provide examples from her own research from various spheres of biology that exhibit the tendency in nature. The value of this theory, and the reason for adding it in here to this discussion around evolution is that — there is an emerging interiority in the cosmos which must be attributed to the natural world if we are to consider the nature of human beings. The emergentist hypothesis in its strong-emergence form helps aid in the reconstruction of the human being from a process perspective. On this note, Clayton remarks that:

Strong emergence — that is, emergence with downward causation — has the merit of preserving commonsense intuitions and corresponding to our everyday experience as agents in the world. *If* it can respond successfully to the criticisms raised by its critics, it may represent one of the most significant philosophical developments of the late twentieth century.”¹²⁵

Although Clayton and Davies’ collection of essays explores vast theories of emergence and their various criticisms, it ultimately ends up without providing a unified theory of emergence.

However, Clayton’s concluding remarks on the philosophy of emergence puts forth a sort of emergentist monism¹²⁶ that rejects multiple kinds of substances and pushes beyond itself toward another nondual region — some combination of emergence theories:

Monism [is] arguing instead that all objects and phenomena in the universe arise out of one basic matter-energy ‘stuff’...Emergentist monism emphasizes continuity through process, the fundamental ontological affinity between all existing things...one might however be just as inclined to use the term emergentist pluralism, which expresses as ontology of continual becoming, To espouse pluralism is to reject any privileged level of

¹²⁴ Clayton and Davies, *The Re-emergence of Emergence: The Emergentist Hypothesis from Science to Religion*, 161.

¹²⁵ Clayton and Davies, *The Re-emergence of Emergence: The Emergentist Hypothesis from Science to Religion*, 27, italics Clayton and Davies’.

¹²⁶ Clayton and Davies, *The Re-emergence of Emergence: The Emergentist Hypothesis from Science to Religion*, 313.

analysis. Combine this emphasis with the previous [emergentist monism]...and one obtains the most balanced, and I believe the most justified, view.¹²⁷

Clayton's balanced view of emergence sets forth a vision within which to think about the evolution of human beings, and also the emergence of the property of mind. This hypothesis also gives philosophers of science a more robust insight into describing the nature of our emerging universe — and the emerging picture that begins to show itself is one in which there is the emergence of not only human beings, but also of a dawning sense of what I would deem a deep religiosity (a caring boundedness in the sense of the Latin *ligare*) not dissimilar to becoming priests of not only the earth, but of the cosmos. John Haught has expressed this idea in the following words:

Instead of rejecting evolutionary science, as many religious believers feel compelled to do, we may now understand all religious quests as ways in which the cosmos, having recently become conscious of itself in human beings, anticipates deeper communion with the elusive rightness still dawning.¹²⁸

Even though Haught's language around 'rightness' is a tad too teleologically-tinged for my taste, what I would reframe this 'rightness still dawning' as is a growing awareness — perhaps, emergence — of a universe conscious of itself in human bodies that welcomes a posture of compassion — of feeling the feelings of the world in such a way that it evokes a reverence for life and a romantic pursuit of subjective Beauty for the entire web of life.

¹²⁷ Clayton and Davies, *The Re-emergence of Emergence: The Emergentist Hypothesis from Science to Religion*, 314.

¹²⁸ Haught, *The New Cosmic Story: Inside Our Awakening Universe*, 23.

Becoming Human — Postmodern Personhood

What role do we have as human beings who perceive, make decisions, laugh, and cry, in this great fresco of the world as depicted by contemporary physics? If the world is a swarm of ephemeral quanta of space and matter; a great jigsaw puzzle of space and elementary particles, then what are we? Do we also consist of only quanta and particles? If so, then from where do we get that sense of individual existence and unique selfhood to which we can all testify? And what then are our values, our dreams, our emotions, our individual knowledge? What are we, in this boundless and glowing world?

— Carlo Rovelli, *Seven Brief Lessons on Physics*¹²⁹

Indeed, a meditation could be given on the above question posed by Rovelli, could it not? Given the cosmic background of this grand vision framed in an evolving reality of events, we now arrive at the question of the concept of personhood — and surely, of Soul; and Whitehead and his interpreters have much to say on the topic. Some address has already been given to the nature of ‘being’ as recast in a fold of ‘becoming,’ but a couple of other concepts are important here to conceive of personhood in the line of Whitehead’s philosophy of organism. Leading into this section, it should come as no surprise that human beings are also emergent developments in the flow of nature — that is, they are not inherently ‘special’ or especially, ‘eternal,’ in any significant way when compared with the whole frame of nature. No, indeed the opposite could be affirmed, as the findings of science are congruent with the Whiteheadian philosophy laid out thus far. Here again Carlo Rovelli, a leading quantum theorist and author, affirms from scientific observation that, “Today, from the point of view provided by our current knowledge of the natural world, this idea raises a smile. If we are special, we are only special in the way that everyone feels themselves to be, like every mother is for her child. Certainly not for the rest of

¹²⁹ Rovelli, *Seven Brief Lessons on Physics*, 65-66, italics mine.

nature.”¹³⁰ This news may come as a disappointment to some, especially those looking to justify a higher place for humanity in the context of nature, or especially, some absurd, immortal soul-substance akin to that inherited by much of Western religion. No, this is not the picture of contemporary physics. The picture painted by science is one in which human beings find themselves anthro-de-centrized, and in any case, revealed to be just like everything else. “We are...an integral part of the world that we perceive; we are not external observers. We are situated within it. Our view of it is from within its midst. We are made up of the same atoms and the same light signals as are exchanged between pine trees in the mountains and stars in the galaxies.”¹³¹ This scientific, anthrodecentrist approach can come as a shock to those who expected to find in themselves something of a ‘special’ place, but — be assured — we may just find ourselves participating in ecological relations that bind our subjective experience to something better.

It should come as no surprise here that a phrase like “a person is a process” could be affirmed. Another way to say this is, “you are an adventure” — and indeed, “an adventure of becoming.” This model of person as process starkly contrasts the substantialist reading of the person received from antiquity. Whitehead has gone to great lengths to critique and overcome the substance-tradition in the line of Aristotle. In this longer passage from *Adventures of Ideas*, Whitehead addresses primary substances directly as they relate to his notion of *process*:

Aristotle introduced the static fallacy by another concept which has infected all subsequent philosophy. He conceived of primary substances as the static foundations which received the impress of qualification. In the case of human experience, a modern version of the same notion is Locke’s metaphor of the mind as an ‘empty cabinet’

¹³⁰ Rovelli, *Seven Brief Lessons on Physics*, 67.

¹³¹ Rovelli, *Seven Brief Lessons on Physics*, 66.

receiving the impress of ideas. Thus for Locke the reality does not reside in the process but in the static recipient of the process. According to the versions of Aristotle and Locke, one primary substance cannot be a component in the nature of another primary substance. Thus the interconnections of primary substances must be devoid of substantial reality of the primary substances themselves. With this doctrine, the conjunction of actualities has, in various shapes, been a problem throughout modern philosophy--both for metaphysics and for epistemology. That taint of Aristotelian Logic has thrown the whole emphasis of metaphysical thought upon substantives and adjectives, to the neglect of prepositions and conjunctions. This Aristotelian doctrine is in this book summarily denied. The process is itself the actuality.¹³²

Affirming, as Whitehead does here that the ‘process is itself the actuality,’ catalyzes a movement that becomes a departure from the ‘static recipient of the process.’ In locating being not there — in the ‘static foundations which received the impress,’ but rather by locating being in the realm of connectivity — the realm of becoming, which is the realm of ‘prepositions and conjunctions,’ then being, especially human being, is to be found in the in-between, in the intermezzo¹³³ of the cosmic refrain if you will. Whitehead’s strong words against the substantialist tradition of Aristotle helps expose the materialist reductionism which has become the popular modern philosophical import, and instead offers up a new doctrine — one in which being is fully reconceived in the intermezzo in terms of *becoming as the activity of being*. Here, no longer is being the static, eternal construct passed down by the Greeks, but rather the organic, processual flow of actual occasions. Said another way, “The atoms of our body, as well, flow in and away from us. We, like waves and like all objects, are a flux of events; we are processes, for a brief time monotonous...”¹³⁴ Human beings are thus more like waves than they are rocks — full of atomic flow and the flux of related events.

¹³² Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 276.

¹³³ Roland Faber, *The Divine Manifold* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014), 81.

¹³⁴ Rovelli, *Reality Is Not What It Seems: The Journey to Quantum Gravity*, 136.

The questions that follow about the structure of personhood now become ones in which we must wonder: “If humans too consist of events just like the whole of reality, then how do the relations between the occasions themselves form themselves to create a human entity?”

Whitehead names groupings of actual occasions as ‘societies,’ which all lifeforms inherently are with respect to their place in the cosmos. Faber comments that: “Human beings organize their organism with the help of a ‘personal society,’ which harbors so much novelty and spontaneity that the society bursts the character of a ‘society’ and develops a *purely living nexus*, that is, a nexus not bound by any (societal) ‘character.’”¹³⁵ For Whitehead, the term ‘nexus’ is a way to name the fields that give birth to actual occasions and living societies, which is why, in the above quotation, Faber notes that this ‘personal society’ — which is the birthplace of the human being — is transcended to become a ‘purely living nexus’ that moves beyond a social order. Here the only difference between human beings and other societies in nature is seen in the difference between a ‘democracy’ such as a plant-structure, to democracies which come together to form animal-structures which he names as ‘personal societies’ like human beings, which are a combination of these ‘personal societies’ which come together to create a ‘living person.’ Again, here Faber comments:

Insofar as such societies transmit their form throughout time... Whitehead speaks of them as persons. A person, hence, is, like a society, not anthropomorphically reduced to either humanity or consciousness. Rather, persons have become general descriptions of a universe in which human expressions are made possible by developments of the evolution of societies without being necessitated by them.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ Faber, *God as Poet of the World: Exploring Process Theologies*, 103.

¹³⁶ Faber, *The Becoming of God: Process Theology, Philosophy, and Multireligious Engagement*, 35.

And so it can be seen here that the Whiteheadian concept of ‘person’ is not solely a statement about human beings, or especially — their consciousness — but is rather a way to affirm the general description of the cosmological scheme as expressed through these novel, evolutionary groupings of occasions. Said more simply, this is a move from something like personal identity to something like personal order. Here the connections are emphasized, not the individual. This view of the person, as mediated by the relations in the process of becoming, can offer us a way beyond the substantialist notion of being in the line of Aristotle and toward restoring human beings to their rightful place in the flow of nature. Faber outlines this principle is saying:

From the perspective of such ecological reconstruction, persons, which Whitehead understands as the highest level of structural intensity, represent a *living nexus* within a complex society, an event nexus that ‘internally’ (with respect to the individual events of the nexus) contains *conscious events* and ‘externally’ (with respect to the social network or arrangement of events) represents a *temporally ordered, living nexus*.¹³⁷

Intensity is also a key concept in the reconceptualization of personhood from a Whiteheadian perspective. Just as in its critique of Darwinian evolution, Whitehead wants to move from natural selection to the increasing of intensity, so here in the construct of personhood, a human life consists of higher intensities of experiences. This is, for Whitehead, where consciousness also enters the conception of person. For Whitehead, “consciousness requires the *highest structural intensity of integration* of given data...and freedom...within the situation of decision.”¹³⁸ So, human consciousness, indeed that consciousness that has ecologically arisen in the flow of the universe, has two qualities — namely, high intensity and spontaneity. It is in this environment that something like the human person arises in nature. Thus, Faber notes that:

¹³⁷ Faber, *God as Poet of the World: Exploring Process Theologies*, 103, italics Faber’s.

¹³⁸ Faber, *God as Poet of the World: Exploring Process Theologies*, 103, italics Faber’s.

Whitehead understands personal self-identity as an intensification process of nonsocial events in a complex organism that shapes itself into a *historical* unity, *a unity of genuinely lived life* of the entire ‘personal society’ (as body and soul). If both identity and originality are to receive due and equal consideration, one must be able to understand human personal being as a highly *creative integration of intensity*.¹³⁹

This brings new meaning to the phrase “that person is intense!” In this sense, a human being’s personhood consists of their unique, individual intensity of a historical unity of experiences that are integrated at a conscious level given the structures within a body that allow for both the collection of the past and the leaning in to future possibilities. This ecological reframing of personhood in Whiteheadian terms helps us to understand more fully the phrase ‘you are an adventure’ — indeed ‘an adventure of becoming’ seeking higher intensities of experience.

Finally, before addressing Whitehead’s critique of the Aristotelian concept of “Soul” in more detail, one more ecological rumination on the concept of personhood remains. In Whitehead’s overall philosophy of organism, how does this concept of person as temporally ordered, living nexus as a highly creative integration of intensity within the larger natural environment, fit in to Whitehead’s overall claim in his notion of Creativity as the category of the ultimate that “The many become one, and are increased by one”?¹⁴⁰ This is Whitehead’s way of talking about the universe as one — as the multiplicitous unity of difference. Faber offers up the following thoughts on this personal experience of the whole: “What it is like to become multiplicity is to *dispossess* experience from the dualism of subjectivity and objectivity and to interpret ‘experience as meaning the ‘self-enjoyment of being one among many, and of being one arising out of the composition of many.’”¹⁴¹ This conception of personal experience as having a

¹³⁹ Faber, *God as Poet of the World: Exploring Process Theologies*, 104, italics Faber’s.

¹⁴⁰ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 21.

¹⁴¹ Faber, *The Divine Manifold*, 326.

quality of the whole will sound like mystical language (because it is), but it is indeed the nondual affirmation of the nature of process-personhood as heretofore conceived. This language borders on the mystical precisely because Whitehead's entire metaphysical scheme invites that type of religious expression. Whitehead used the Platonic concept of 'khora' to speak about reality, and Roland Faber in his antiessentialist reading of Whitehead's concept of personhood, uses this khoric reality to describe the person in this beautiful passage from *The Becoming of God*:

Whitehead expresses the view that what actually makes up the person as such is neither organization (hierarchy) nor novelty (chaos) per se, but the very *space* that constitutes the togetherness of events as such, in the concrete life history of a certain organism. On this view, a person is not a (separate) soul, but also not a (separate) body of the collected experiences throughout space and time, but the contiguity of the most basic interrelationship of its events. In other words, a person is a drop of the expansive medium of existence *itself* on the most basic level (in Whitehead's analysis), namely, of the mutual immanence of (all) events. In *Adventures of Ideas*, Whitehead follows Plato's analysis of *khora*, of *hypodochē*, of the 'place' of existence, of the 'receptacle' of existence, of the foster mother of becoming, to make this suggestion.¹⁴²

We will see why this conception begs at God in the final rumination in this study, but for now, the import of this Faberian khoric reading of personhood seems to best describe the intent of Whitehead himself. Khora is a sort of indeterminate affirmation of a field of becoming that does not exist, but that becomes the foster mother of existence. It is a kind of universal that cannot be captured by any universal, which in Whiteheadian terms is defined as a sort of unitive relationality rather than universal difference. This is, in essence, what Whitehead means when he discusses khora as receptacle of reality — that same nonexistent locality beyond reality in which all persons also generate their becoming. If that sounds like yet another nondual claim to you, then you are now starting to pick up on a common theme.

¹⁴² Faber, *The Becoming of God: Process Theology, Philosophy, and Multireligious Engagement*, 38, italics Faber's.

So, to summarize, this process-reconceptualization of personhood has four core claims and affects. First, it places human beings not as an exception to nature, but as having emerged within it. This means that persons are not special in any way apart from the whole of nature, but consist of the same eventual ‘stuff’ of nature. Secondly, being is constituted by becoming — that is, by its process. Being is a sort of intermezzo of continual becoming in which it is impossible to pause the flow and ‘find’ the person which is constituted by its own becoming. This is also a way to embrace an actually living being — one that is in motion, actually alive. Thirdly, persons are the ‘living nexus’ of Whiteheadian articulation. That is, they are locations not for the ordering of personal identity, but rather of personal intensity that represents a historical unity of occasions that ‘superject’ toward novel intensities that are unities of relationships of experiences. And fourthly, having named the first three elements of this reconceptualization of person and locating it within the natural world of becoming — which is the ‘what’ of the external setting of the person, the last element is to place these persons in their internal congruency — that is, the ‘who’ which is their wider place as a part of the khoric whole. This last component means that not only are persons a part of nature, but they are that ‘drop of the expansive medium that is existence itself’ aforementioned by Faber, and this is the locus of the mutual immanence of the multiplicity of events that coinhere in their self-realizations as a whole. This is an antiessentialist reading of personhood as having its ultimate ground in the wider flow of interrelated events in a space that is not the natural world, but is rather its creative environment — the very nest of becoming. This latter element is what Faber describes here in this final statement: “As the *nonsocial vitality of an entirely living nexus*, human personal being is *immediately* connected or linked with the ground

of the cosmos, the *basic (chaotic) nexus* at the foundation of all orders, societies, and spontaneity within the cosmos.”¹⁴³ This is the khoric ground of a person.

Against Soul-Substance

Another addendum to be contributed to this process-concept of personhood is to juxtapose the previous conversation with one around the religious concept of ‘Soul.’ This concept of soul flows naturally from the preceding concepts already explored. Soul, as in the Aristotelian definition of soul-substance, has already been criticized by Whitehead in the above section from *Adventures of Ideas* in moving from soul as the ‘static recipient of the process’ to some non-substantialist notion of soul *as* process. One might be able here to distinguish Whitehead’s concept of Soul as an actuality. The word “Soul” in the Greek is the word “psyche” from which the English word “psyche” is derived. For Whitehead, mentality *or* experience is a property of all events, and thus this “psyche” of the persons as defined in the previous section is the Whiteheadian reading of the nonsubstantialist Soul. Again, to illustrate this point, Faber elaborates that: “Personal being does not possess any substantialist anteriority; it is instead *a cumulative process of the history* of the entire personal society. Persons ‘attain’ *themselves* in their history, the becoming of their organism, their lived life.”¹⁴⁴ This attainment is the classical idea of Soul, but it carries with it a different, more ephemeral, quality here than the soul-substance of antiquity. One must understand the distinction here between the ‘form’ of self-

¹⁴³ Faber, *God as Poet of the World: Exploring Process Theologies*, 105, italics Faber’s.

¹⁴⁴ Faber, *God as Poet of the World: Exploring Process Theologies*, 105, italics Faber’s.

identical Aristotelian conception, and Whitehead's reformation of subjective forms. Along this note, Faber writes:

This dilemma [how personal unity and living vitality can be brought together] has traditionally been resolved in favor of restrictive unity. The paradigmatic locus of such resolution is the Platonic-Aristotelian doctrine of the soul as *form*... In Whitehead's critique [of self-identical Soul-Substance], such forms appear not as subjects, but as *objects* actualized as possibilities within events (ontological principle). Whitehead reconstructs 'substantial forms' as *macrocosmic repetition of patterns* in series of events, as the development of a formal structure of temporal societies.¹⁴⁵

This analysis hits at a core question of the Soul — namely, how can the creativity of aliveness coexist with the unity of a person's past experiences? Indeed, Whitehead himself takes up this conversation in *Process and Reality* in saying; "The doctrine of the enduring soul with its permanent characteristics is exactly the irrelevant answer to the problem which life presents. That problem is, How can there be originality? And the answer explains how the soul need be no more original than a stone."¹⁴⁶ In this playful response to the concept of the enduring soul, Whitehead responds by saying that the substantive Soul is kind of like a rock. And clearly, considering the realm of Whitehead's philosophy of organism, in process thought, a rock consists of the same 'stuff' (in terms of events) as does the human being, but alas his playfulness here is aimed at a critique of the substantialist objectification of that substance as equated with the Soul.

The historical answer explored in the aforementioned Platonic-Aristotelian doctrine of the soul as 'form' was a way for those in the substantialist tradition to provide a sort of permanence — an enduring (eternal) quality within an independent being that sustains activity. This was conceived of as the soul-substance, like the rock of Whitehead's analogy. Contrastingly,

¹⁴⁵ Faber, *God as Poet of the World: Exploring Process Theologies*, 104, italics Faber's.

¹⁴⁶ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 104.

Whitehead's radical-empirical reading of subjective experience does not necessitate this substantialist conclusion of a soul that is akin to a rock-object, but rather instead he postulates that: "The successive immanence of occasion after occasion in the life of the soul will in the present occasion of that life include the culmination of the successive prehensions of some particular object."¹⁴⁷ So, what Whitehead is alluding to here is that, although objects like rocks are included in the successive prehensions of the soul-flow, the successive immanence of occasions characterizes the soul, not the objects it prehends. Patricia Farmer, another process philosopher who has written on the nature of the Soul has included something of this cumulative effect of the immanence of occasions in her "Fat Soul" philosophy. In her introduction to the Soul, she reflects that she does not mean the physical body when she speaks of it, but rather, "The psyche, the soul, the river of experiences that makes up who we are."¹⁴⁸ For Farmer, the 'fat soul' is a soul saturated with Beauty — and although this 'cumulative flow' lends itself to a more substantive reading of Soul, as a process philosopher herself, this is not what she means by it. The word to be emphasized in this is flow, not cumulative, for accumulation borders on the materialism fought by Whitehead. This accumulation is an accumulation rather of subjective experiences that continues forward — it is explicitly *not* the animal body. Whitehead confirms this intuition in *Adventures of Ideas* in saying:

Transcendence begins with the leap from the actuality of the immediate occasion to the notion of personal existence, which is a society of occasions. In terms of human life, the soul is a society...Beyond the soul, there are other societies, and societies of societies. There is the animal body ministering to the soul: there are families, groups of families,

¹⁴⁷ Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 262.

¹⁴⁸ Patricia Adams Farmer, *Fat Soul: A Philosophy of S-I-Z-E* (Shiprock Press, 2016), 11.

nations, species, groups involving different species associated in the joint enterprise of keeping alive.¹⁴⁹

In this comparison, Whitehead notes that the animal body ‘ministers to the soul,’ thus naturally drawing a distinction between the two concepts. Personal existence is thus contained in the leap from the immediate experience of the actual occasion to the society of experiencing occasions or ‘events’ — the society that exists in the nest of becoming of other societies, and indeed, societies of societies of societies that make up the whole. This ‘leaping’ sense of one’s own immanence in another is one example of this porous understanding of the Soul, while the other is that one’s own self-transcendence is bound up in relations which widen one’s Soul connections beyond one’s own egoic constructs.

It is to this sense of creatively advancing self-transcendence that we now turn in reflecting on the nature of Soul in Whiteheadian conceptualization. When Whitehead talks about the nature of Cartesian philosophical reflection on identity, he writes that: “Each time he [Descartes] pronounces ‘I am, I exist,’ the actual occasion, which is the ego, is different; and the ‘he’ which is common to the two egos is an eternal object or, alternatively, the nexus of successive occasions.”¹⁵⁰ Thus, there is something like a self-transcending impulse to be accepted in the Whiteheadian conception of Soul. For the Cartesian mind, the moment of coming into contact with a sense of “I am” — the moment of ego — is a moment of self-identification on the basis of just that — *that* moment. But, Whitehead would argue that, if that is the case, there are lots of “yous” to keep tethered together in the sense of ‘many egos.’ Here he doesn’t directly deny the continuity between one’s self-identification from one moment and the next, but rather,

¹⁴⁹ Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 291.

¹⁵⁰ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 75.

he reframes that “I” in terms of the nexus of successive occasions which produce an individual’s particular experience of personhood. A person receives one’s past and incorporates it into the successive moment, while ever-creating oneself anew. Here, Whitehead’s conception of the Soul can be brought into dialogue with his favorite Hericlitian axiom that “no one steps in the same river twice.” So it is also true that no Soul stays the same or repeats itself — for, as the events that constitute its becoming pass into objective reality, they inevitably shift the quality of the nexus of successive occasions in such a way that the ‘same self’ can never be returned to. Instead, this emergent, processual flow of the Soul is one that leans into one’s own self-transcendence as both the aim and quality of the Soul — a Soul whose nature is the releasing of ego to be freed into creative expression. This is not only true in Whitehead’s ontology of the Soul, but it is also true of the kind of relationality heretofore laid out upon his vision. Thus, the Soul here *is* one’s own experience of one’s mutual immanence and mutual transcendence. Faber once more sums this up nicely in bringing a khoric final movement to this conception of the Soul:

When the *spontaneous ground of the world* breaks through in persons, it is experienced as the communicative *common* creative ground between persons...In a sense transcending Whitehead’s own understanding, personal being can be understood as a *community of inexhaustible spontaneity* —and in the “*chaotic*” *nexus as communication* expressing the ‘foundation’ of the world. Personal being is disclosed as the ‘place of emptiness’ — Plato’s ‘place’ (khora) or ‘receptacle’ where communication and creativity become intertwined.¹⁵¹

To sum it up, a process conception of the Soul — indeed the one embraced in this study — is one that is a Soul consisting of relations, of prehensions — that is the superjecting cumulative flow of spontaneous experiences found in the khoric receptacle where ‘communication and creativity

¹⁵¹ Faber, *God as Poet of the World: Exploring Process Theologies*, 106, italics Faber’s.

become intertwined.’ In short, the Soul is inherently immanent in its relations and transcendent in its nature.

Cosmic Interiority — An Anticipatory Approach

Given this approach as laid out thus far, one may begin to have a deeper sense of the ecological setting of not only the eventual nature of reality, but also of the the living society developed in Whitehead’s personhood. This reframing matters more today than it ever has, as what is being observed in the field of cosmology does not suit the Aristotelian-substance conception of the Soul very well. Alternatively, this cosmic flow of events is telling a story 13.8 billion years in the making — a story that is still unfolding. Another way to frame the adventure of becoming — the very adventure of the Universe — is to say that these cosmic events take place in an unfinished universe, but also in a universe with an emerging interiority. In fact, contemporary philosopher of science John Haught has highlighted just this fact in his recent work, *The New Cosmic Story*. In essence, Haught is chronicling the cosmic story from the inside — that is, from its own subjective experience of itself. This is a field that is only recently emerging, and in fact, Haught goes as far as to say:

Running silently through the heart of matter, a series of events that would flower into ‘subjectivity’ has been part of the universe from the start. So hidden is this interior side of the cosmos from public examination that scientists and philosophers with materialist leanings usually claim it has no real existence. Leaving subjectivity out of their representations of the cosmos, however, they fail to tell the whole story.¹⁵²

Haught feels as though what has remained on the cutting room floor of the materialist narrative is the universe’s own subjective experience. Why this matters will soon become apparent for this

¹⁵² Haught, *The New Cosmic Story: Inside Our Awakening Universe*, 15.

study, but for now, its important to note that the ‘mental laminate’ version of the bifurcation of reality from Sandra Lubarsky’s articulation in the first section is here again relevant to describe the way in which those telling the new story of cosmology are not turning things inside-out enough. Rather, many continue to lean into explanations of the physics that don’t embrace its own internal subjective experience, but rather continue to explain mental phenomena as something ‘external’ to the bits of matter that make up reality. In seeking to tell the ‘whole’ story, Haught proposes that there are three main ways of reading the new cosmic story he outlines — ones that he names as: “archaeonomic, analogical, and anticipatory.”¹⁵³ The archaeonomic approach suggests that we can understand what is going on in the universe only by “digging back into its remotest past, excavating the series of physical causes that have led up to the present from the beginning.”¹⁵⁴ For Haught, this is not necessarily referring to “scientific analysis or archaeological exploration of the past but to a contemporary comprehensive metaphysics...that considers analytical or archaeological scientific inquiry the only right way to understand present phenomena.”¹⁵⁵ The analogical approach he describes means a kind of looking upon the “perishable things in nature as, at best, imperfect representations or analogies of eternal and invisible originals existing beyond the empirically available world...the ‘way of analogy’ fixes its attention on what it takes to be an ‘eternal present,’ a realm of perfect being said to exist beyond the physical world of becoming and perishing.”¹⁵⁶ He reflects further to add that “Today devotees of analogy, especially perennialists, have almost no interest in looking for meaning in the long evolutionary story of life or, more generally, in the 13.8 billion years of cosmic

¹⁵³ Haught, *The New Cosmic Story: Inside Our Awakening Universe*, 32.

¹⁵⁴ Haught, *The New Cosmic Story: Inside Our Awakening Universe*, 32.

¹⁵⁵ Haught, *The New Cosmic Story: Inside Our Awakening Universe*, 33.

¹⁵⁶ Haught, *The New Cosmic Story: Inside Our Awakening Universe*, 34.

process.”¹⁵⁷ Lastly, the position that Haught locates himself in throughout the rest of the book is taking the third position of that of an anticipatory approach to reading the universe. “Anticipation allows that more-being or fuller-being can emerge in time...it reads the cosmic story both scientifically and religiously from the outside and inside simultaneously, It fully accepts evolutionary biology, Big Bang cosmology, and other scientific fields of research that contribute to our sense that nature has a narrative constitution.”¹⁵⁸ Haught further adds to his articulation of this approach by saying that “according to anticipation, what is most real arrives silently and unobtrusively, and we can get it only by an adventurous leap toward the not-yet.”¹⁵⁹

It is this leap into the not-yet that most resoundingly harmonizes with the universal flow that has heretofore been described in the poststructuralist-process Whiteheadian perspective as advocated for by Faber and Keller. There are a couple distinctions to draw here, but my hope is that the connections are enlightening. The first is the connection with the ‘religious’ dimension of the life of the cosmos. Religion, as defined by Haught, can be seen in the following articulation: “In an unfinished universe, religion is an adventurous anticipation of what is just beginning to dawn rather than a return to what has already been. Nor is it a basking in the glow of an eternal present.”¹⁶⁰ Here, Haught equates religion with a posture that human life can take that begins to welcome — indeed create hospitality toward — a posture of anticipation of that which is to come, the very nature of adventure, of Whiteheadian zest. But, when Haught explores a bit further the religious dimension (this narrative, anticipatory, internal element unexplored by much of physics), he names it as a dawning sense of rightness. He writes, “During the past two

¹⁵⁷ Haught, *The New Cosmic Story: Inside Our Awakening Universe*, 35.

¹⁵⁸ Haught, *The New Cosmic Story: Inside Our Awakening Universe*, 35.

¹⁵⁹ Haught, *The New Cosmic Story: Inside Our Awakening Universe*, 43.

¹⁶⁰ Haught, *The New Cosmic Story: Inside Our Awakening Universe*, 23.

centuries, science has gradually presented the universe for all to see as a grand adventure, full of twists and turns we never knew about until recently... What the universe is really all about, at least when read religiously, is awakening to the dawning of rightness.”¹⁶¹ From the perspective of this exploration, the distinction to be made here with Haught’s claim about rightness is that the telic element advocated for by Cobb earlier, and here in another form by Haught, contrasts with Whitehead’s own conception of becoming events that achieve a level of value for their own self-realization, which is always a realization of the value of Beauty in some sense for the whole of the cosmos. Thus, a more processual way to articulate a similar idea would be to say that the universe is awakening to the deepening intensity of Beauty, which containing the elements of truth and goodness, has an ethical dimension of rightness to it — as in right-relations to other actualities who also share in their own intrinsic value — but not as in the sense of some ethical omega point that the universe is barreling toward. Haught further adds that, in the anticipatory approach to the cosmic narrative he employs,

In other words, indestructible rightness is not lurking in fully finished splendor outside the universe, as analogy often assumes. Rightness is both a never-exhausted reservoir of new possibilities for cosmic becoming and a boundless compassion that allows nothing that ever happens in the universe to be lost absolutely.¹⁶²

Here Haught extends his definition of rightness as a way to talk about possibility and boundless compassion, which is a much more helpful framing, however the sense in his language that it is heading to some culmination — some horizon of ultimate rightness, is heretofore everlastingly postponed by the reality of Whitehead’s conception. However, if this nest of becoming, this boundless flow of compassion is what he means by rightness, our definitions are much closer

¹⁶¹ Haught, *The New Cosmic Story: Inside Our Awakening Universe*, 14-15.

¹⁶² Haught, *The New Cosmic Story: Inside Our Awakening Universe*, 82.

than upon first glance. I just wish he had chosen a different term like the aforementioned ‘Beauty’ rather than ‘rightness.’

Secondly, I want to reflect for a moment on Haught’s notion of the religious and bring it together with yet another Whiteheadian harmonic contrast. Haught acknowledges that even what he means by the ‘religious’ dimension of universal experience is still itself in the process of emerging. Along these lines, he writes: “The unity of religious experience, from this... [anticipatory] perspective is a goal that has yet to be realized since the universe, of which religion is a part, is still in the process of becoming.”¹⁶³ This is an important distinction to make, as it highlights the reality that this fuller sense of religion has yet to be achieved and is yet another adventurous component of the cosmic story. This sense of religious becoming is deeply Whiteheadian, in the sense that, for Whitehead, “The notion of transcendence [is] the feeling essential for Adventure, Zest, and Peace... This Adventure embraces all particular occasions but as an actual fact stands beyond any one of them.”¹⁶⁴ This harmonic contrast between Haught’s deepening internal religious dimension of cosmic life and Whitehead’s self-transcending notion of creative advance creates a beautiful picture within which to think about the adventure of becoming. Haught calls this affect a ‘metaphysics of the future’ in stating:

What is needed is a whole new metaphysics, a coherent view of reality that is conceptually wide enough to embrace simultaneously (a) the inner world of awakening subjectivity, (b) the outer world of scientific discovery, and (c) the horizon of indestructible rightness to which the cosmos is awakening. What I am proposing is an anticipatory vision of the world based on a ‘metaphysics of the future.’¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ Haught, *The New Cosmic Story: Inside Our Awakening Universe*, 20.

¹⁶⁴ Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 295.

¹⁶⁵ Haught, *The New Cosmic Story: Inside Our Awakening Universe*, 88.

Again, here the semantics of Haught's word choices are not preferable to this study, but the meaning they attempt to convey is resonant with my own approach — one could indeed affirm something very similar in calling it a 'futuring cosmology' or a 'cosmopoetics of becoming.' Thus, Haught's rearticulation of the cosmic story in which the interior dimension of its awakening is included, and the increasing sense of the religious, anticipatory posture of welcoming that which is to come is a beautiful place to bring this section to a close. This narritival opening allows for a cosmopoetics of becoming in which we can shift "our main metaphor for the universe from mechanism to that of drama" and replace "the juridical image of nature's inviolable laws with that of grammatical rules" helps us to "fully embrace modern scientific discoveries while leaving ample room for the coming of novelty, surprise, more-being, deeper meaning, and human freedom into the cosmic narrative."¹⁶⁶ This is a challenge to inhabit the universe from the inside — to take an anticipatory posture in our living that will be more fully explored in the realm of a praxis or mystagogy of becoming in the next section. The unfolding drama of an awakening universe that consists of events and is deepening the religious dimension of its own subjective experience affords a meditation on the posturing of the human life — an applied orientation for human beings to take that invites Beauty in the nest of becoming of which all things are a part.

¹⁶⁶ Haught, *The New Cosmic Story: Inside Our Awakening Universe*, 201.

Chapter IV: Incarnating Nondual Reality: The Posture of Contemplative Wholing

Peace carries with it a surpassing of personality. There is an inversion of relative values. It is primarily a trust in the efficacy of Beauty. It is a sense that fineness of achievement is as it were a key unlocking treasures that the narrow nature of things would keep remote... The trust in the self-justification of Beauty introduces faith, where reason fails to reveal the details.

— Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*¹⁶⁷

The flow of this study thus far has been an exploration of reality from the inside-out, and thus, admittedly also an explication of that highest cosmic value of Beauty. The narrative that is emerging is one in which a reality of quantum events — as attested to in both theoretical physics and a postmodern philosophy of science — has a deepening sense of interiority to its own becoming. This growing, universal subjective experience has resulted in new insights as to the functionality of the one organism that is the continually-expanding cosmos, in which living nexus have arisen and the personhood of the individual is now framed in terms of one's own becoming and relatedness to the larger whole. This narrative is still unfurling, and now turns toward the question: “How might one live’ in response to this deepening subjectivity?” If we are to take seriously the anticipatory posture as articulated by Haught above and placed in conversation with the philosophy developed in the poststructuralist-Whiteheadian stream, then we must begin to address this religious sensibility that is a part of the emergent development of the cosmos. As mentioned in the introduction, the rampant reductionist secularism of our time in the West, and the decline of religious observance amongst the ‘spiritual but not religious’ provides the setting in which to address these important questions about the religious postures available given the cosmic picture that we currently have. Inevitably, this discussion will dance

¹⁶⁷ Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 285, italics mine.

with meaning and value, as well as what sorts of traditions and practices are available to this world for the generations that will comprise its future. It is the express claim of this study that whatever practices will take root in future religious observance, they will need to be resonant with contemporary visions of the world from theoretical physics, current research on the neurobiological benefits of religious practices for the brain and body, and consonant with at least some continued stream of a given religious tradition, which includes, but does not necessitate novel, confluent interspiritual traditions. For the purposes of this study, the chosen tradition to exemplify will be that of Christianity, and the specific stream will be the contemplative ‘alternative orthodoxy’ form of Christianity enfolded by Cynthia Bourgeault and Richard Rohr at the Center For Action and Contemplation. My hope here is to explore the ramifications of the science and philosophy of the cosmos and the self in such away that they are brought into a critical harmony with a particular religious tradition (aforementioned) in a particular time (now) and place (the West) so as to provide a living philosophy of praxis for today’s disenfranchised spiritual but not religious people with a Christian sacred canopy in the spirit of Whitehead’s creative, nondual cosmological scheme, as reified by contemporary discussions in physics and biology. Indeed, this will prove to be a thoroughly nondual incarnation of the religious sensibilities that have developed in our enfolding cosmic story.

In No Time — The Difficulty of Being Present

Contemporary spiritual writings are dripping with allusions to becoming, without fully updating their categorical language to take them all the way there. For, that would mean shifting terms that are riddled with ‘Being’ toward ‘Becoming,’ and language around ‘Personality’ toward

‘Relationality,’ ‘Identity’ toward ‘Intensity,’ and the like. The reality is, however, that our common-sense experience of ourselves is as having something like a ‘self’ — a center of experience or, historically, ‘seat of being,’ in which we have a name and thus an identity as an ‘I’ among a ‘we,’ and as a ‘one’ among ‘two’ or ‘many.’ It is not uncommon for spiritual teachers to use the language of ‘centering’ oneself, and indeed, this study will explore the methodology of Centering Prayer in great detail shortly — however, another way to ‘stay centered’ is also often called ‘being present.’ The only issue with that language in a processual world like that articulated by Whitehead is that it’s a bit tough to actually ‘be present’ as all great spiritual teachers eventually admonish their adherents to be, as it is difficult to ‘be’ at all when we can only ‘become.’ It’s difficult precisely because there is no true all-encompassing present in after the revelation of Einsteinian special relativity and its disclosure that the spacetime that we have come to observe and prove in our contemporary vision of the world is not universal at all. There is really only a way for us to ‘be present’ to the field of events — that ‘intermediate zone’ or ‘extended present’¹⁶⁸ that is available to us in our field of sense-perception. This is a zone that is neither past nor future, but it is also not universal. There is no universal time in this manner. In some sense, the ‘present’ of your intermediate zone is just that, *your* present. Thus, your time is not my time, and my time is not time on a mountaintop, or especially on Mars, etc. Conversely, if the actual world is the world of becoming, then in the real world of activity — indeed of process — there is no ‘now,’ but rather only a sort of ‘nowing,’ — the subjective experience of the flow of possibility and of the objects that have actualized and become concrete. But, these objects, like the bodies of our experience and the planet which we inhabit are not here ‘now,’ in the sense

¹⁶⁸ Rovelli, *Reality Is Not What It Seems: The Journey to Quantum Gravity*, 71.

that we may feel them to be. They are rather always in the objective past — for the living world is always moving — the living world is the adventure.

Whitehead has embraced this type of flow to describe actualities in their own process of becoming:

The very essence of real actuality—that is, of the completely real—is process. Thus each actual thing is only understood in terms of its becoming and perishing. There is no halt in which the actuality is just its static self, accidentally played upon by qualifications derived from the shift of circumstances. The converse is the truth. The static notion, [is] here rejected.¹⁶⁹

What Whitehead is exploring in the above quote is the affirmation of this processual advance in each actual (read real) thing — and what's further, he goes on to explain that there is never a halt where this is some form of static self (which there might seem to be in a moment of contemplation or self-reflection), but rather that static notion is rejected. Thus, the call of many spiritual practices to pause and 'be present' is to be present to two things simultaneously which comprise the subjective experience of your own becoming — the concrescent integration of the world of fact and the world of possibility. The living universe exists in the in-between of these two poles in Whitehead's thought, which are also called 'physical' and 'mental' poles. The experiencing personal subject is again placed here in the intermezzo of time — between two worlds, both in and out of time. Carlo Rovelli beautifully articulates this concept in saying: "Our intuitive idea of the present, the ensemble of all events happening 'now' in the universe, is an effect of our blindness: our inability to recognize small temporal intervals. An illegitimate extrapolation from our parochial experience. The present is like the flatness of the earth: an

¹⁶⁹ Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 274-275.

illusion.”¹⁷⁰ For, there is no all-encompassing present, but solely the extension of the intermediate zone of our immediate experience in which ‘we’ do not exist, but do in fact live and move and have our becoming in our spatiotemporal extension. “How is this nondual relationship with time possible?,” one might retort? “Our universe can be finite but borderless” due to the curvature of spacetime,”¹⁷¹ replies Rovelli. Indeed, this conception of time is one way to engage the idea of multiplicity — the multiplicity of events in which we all consist and make up the macro of our observable universe. Along these lines, Roland Faber refracts the question around multiplicity by asking: “‘What it is like’ to be a multiplicity of events of multiplicity *among* a multiplicity of events of multiplicity is to experience the chaosmos as the ‘mystery of creative passage.’ In/finite becoming happens in *passages*. Passages are creative by passing (away), where Life is death.”¹⁷² This chaosmos, full of the passages which Faber refers to here, are “pathways, mediums, ‘canals’ and ‘channels’ of flow, means of ‘canalization,’ traversing, transgressing. Passages are passing and becoming ‘past,’ generating facts, something that ‘matters’, a ‘stubborn’ resistance against appropriation, manipulation, and possession. Passages are ‘encounters’ by which we (as in the Pesach) are reborn in death. They are gifts of Life in peril.”¹⁷³ And so, we move into the realm yet again of the nondual nature of time, in which flow is the real, and the ephemeral, passing of things is the bothsidedness of a life that moves forward through death. For, as novelist Peter De Vries so melancholically put it, “Death is the commonest thing in the universe,” which of course, from a process perspective also means that ‘so is life,

¹⁷⁰ Rovelli, *Reality Is Not What It Seems: The Journey to Quantum Gravity*, 75.

¹⁷¹ Rovelli, *Reality Is Not What It Seems: The Journey to Quantum Gravity*, 95.

¹⁷² Faber, *The Divine Manifold*, 327.

¹⁷³ Faber, *The Divine Manifold*, 327.

and, so is the creative advance' — it is just that they are bound inextricably forever in the choreography of the adventure of the universe as one.

We, as experiencing subjects, are never really in the present in terms of spacetime. That's where our materiality exists when the actual occasions that comprise our bodies eventually reside having already actualized and thus become objects for others toprehend, but our bodies are not *who* we are. They are hardly even *what* we are, although they are beautiful conduits that help in the mediation of our subjective experiences. Perhaps a more resonant way to conceptualize the body with this Whiteheadian concept is seen in philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty's understanding of 'flesh.' Faber again here notes that "Merleau-Ponty's term 'flesh' does not indicate material, matter, or materiality, but the feeling of being externally and internally related to the cosmos beyond us—through our body, folded and folded back."¹⁷⁴ This subjective emphasis on the feeling of relatedness is one which highlights what it means to be present in a 'body,' which is a symbol that has become concrete or a memento of the past occasion. This enfolding experience of being folded and folded back again is one which helps illuminate the way in which one can transcend their own experience of their embodiedness, while keeping a firm grasp on the sense-experience it helps mediate. The question of how one can 'be present' in a way that is meaningful given this conception of personhood and the body will soon follow. This affords also some opportunities for one to 'be' one in a fundamentally different modality in terms of their posture of life — it provides a direct opening for one to be open to the many, of which they are already always and ever a part. Moving away from individuation, it emphasizes connection with the whole — with that khoric reality that is somehow beyond embodiment and

¹⁷⁴ Faber, *The Divine Manifold*, 295-296.

yet related to it. In a very real sense, what constitutes a person is their place in the larger reality of the becoming whole. Opening oneself to this reality, however, creates a tenuous relationship with the body and one's embodied experience, and inevitably causes one to reflect on the experience and integration of suffering. For as Faber ruminates once more so poetically:

From the perspective of this *polyphilic* body, however, precisely *this is* the wound of things: their misplaced concreteness in abstract stabilization. In polyphilic suspension, the 'wound of things' is their *possession*. 'Healing' is *their passage*. The *love of passage*, the creative passage as polyphilia, is a radical disruption of the power of possession or the possession of power. How does one love multiplicity? In healing the wound of things! This 'healing' is dangerous...The 'wound' this opening leaves behind in 'things' is their transgression, de/construction, subtractive affirmation, skillful suspension, and negotiation such that 'things' always want to cover over them with the seamless One. The *polyphonic wound of 'things'* is their *dispossession*, their khoric passage into the 'divine game' in which to affirm *All* of multiplicity is their 'salvation.'¹⁷⁵

This moving beyond the wound of things is what Faber begins to refer to the 'mystagogy of passage,'¹⁷⁶ which is a helpful framing within which to begin to think about contemplative religious practice as an invitation to communion with multiplicity. What Faber is alluding to here without explicitly stating it is the modern sense of the 'ego' or the 'I' as abstracted from the multiplicitous process of becoming. Here he calls us to a place beyond 'I' in which the wound that ego creates can also be transcended when one comes to dispossess their own identity for the sake of cultivating a love of 'passage' — which is another way to say becoming. Here, Faber suggests that learning to love 'becoming' can become salvific if one becomes connected to the divine game of multiplicity of which all things are a part. Clearly here as well, time becomes relativized in an actually meaningful way, as it too is a sort of abstraction unworthy of being so stabilized as to cause a wound, and thus the call to 'be present' must also be transformed into a

¹⁷⁵ Faber, *The Divine Manifold*, 328.

¹⁷⁶ Faber, *The Divine Manifold*, 329.

novel expression as well in order to not wound its adherent. Perhaps the call to ‘be present’ of much of contemporary contemplative Christian spirituality should rather be the call to ‘become whole’ — which is always to be connected to a wholing multiplicity of difference that is itself an adventure of becoming.

Evolutionary Spirituality

To embrace that a religious dimension of life has evolved in the history of our cosmos, as John Haught, Pierre Teilhard De Chardin, Ilia Delio, and others have suggested, is paramount given all that has been observed in this study thus far. To be sure, there are many religious postures and many paths toward enlightenment long carved out, but the question now to be explored is this: “What place has *becoming* in the teaching, language, and praxis of religion — specifically in the aforementioned Christian contemplative tradition via the Center for Action and Contemplation?” It is not uncommon for contemporary spiritual teachers in this stream today such as Cynthia Bourgault and Richard Rohr, two of the faculty from the Center, to emphasize something like an ‘evolutionary spirituality’ — that is, a spiritual perspective that embraces and integrates evolutionary theories of change. As already mentioned, Teilhard had done much of that work in the 20th century. But, the question here remains as to whether a living philosophy of becoming has been fully integrated into the Center’s language, teaching, and praxis. In their journal *Oneing*, the Center enlists its teachers and students in exploring different topics via short essay. In Edition 4 No. 2, titled “Evolutionary Thinking,” they explicitly explore the topic of evolution from different angles as it applies to their own spiritual teaching. In Fr. Rohr’s opening introduction, he writes: “It has always seemed completely strange to me that there should be any

resistance whatsoever to evolution or evolutionary thinking in Christian theology and practice. Instead, Christians should have been the first in line to recognize and cooperate with such a dynamic notion..."¹⁷⁷ He grounds this understanding in his theological perspective by arguing for a flux view of the Ultimate in his tradition — God. Beautifully, he writes to justify an evolutionary perspective by writing against a fixed view of the divine in saying: "I can only assume that this reflects a very limited inner experience of God, which is always an predictably developmental and unfolding — never static. Anyone with an inner life of prayer and a sense of soul know this to be true...life and love are always cumulative, growing, and going somewhere that is *always new and always more*."¹⁷⁸ Here, it can be seen that, especially in this edition of *Oneing*, there is an express desire to integrate evolutionary thinking into their language and teaching. The rest of the volume explores this topic from different perspectives, and does so alluringly and inspiringly, although much of the hopeful posture expressed in the Center's theological perspective is grounded in a telic conception of the cosmos that moves toward the good not dissimilar to Cobb, Haught, or Teilhard.

Can the true openness of creative becoming really be embraced if there is a telos that is prescribed as an end goal? For instance, Rohr mentions "Foundational hope *demands* a foundational belief in a world that is still and always unfolding. Personally, I have found that it is almost impossible to heal individuals, over the long haul, if the whole cosmic arc is not also a trajectory toward the good."¹⁷⁹ This 'whole cosmic arc' claim is not uncommon to Christian theology, as many eschatological conceptions reflect something of this kind of hope. This claim

¹⁷⁷ Richard Rohr, "Introduction," *Oneing* 4, no. 2 (2016): 13.

¹⁷⁸ Rohr, "Introduction," 14, italics Rohr's.

¹⁷⁹ Rohr, "Introduction," 14, italics Rohr's.

is problematic for Whitehead himself, and for his philosophical scheme, although many process thinkers have attempted to reconcile hopeful claims about the teleological direction of the cosmos with Whitehead's scheme of creative advance. Many do so successfully in terms of integrating a telic eschatological perspective with their own overall appropriation of Whitehead's cosmology, however Whitehead himself resisted this temptation in continuing to uphold the centrality of his philosophic embrace of creativity. If one takes Whitehead's value theory as a framing in which to think about the achievement of the adventure of the cosmos as some end, there is perhaps some novel potential to be realized in terms of a reconceptualization of what that kind of hope that could entail. Indeed, all too often those who continue on with the historic Christian tradition, even in the contemplative posture of the alternative orthodoxy purported by The Center for Action and Contemplation, lapse into a sort of analogical worldview combatted by Haught's philosophy. Here, his comments ring true: "The analogical worldview...having come into prominence during the prescientific period of human history, is appealing precisely because it holds out the prospect of human persons being rescued by a transcendent dimension of being from imprisonment in a decaying material world."¹⁸⁰ Although the above comment quoted by Rohr does not expressly make a claim like this, nor does the Center in any observable way advocate for the mistreatment of the planet or the material world, in my observation, theologies (even mystical ones) that continue to attempt to harmonize prescientific views of the body/soul/world with contemporary understanding do not end up doing so very successfully. Although their practices may 'in praxis' *actually* help persons cultivate a mystagogy of becoming and a sense of communion within multiplicity, many are still latched on to static phrasings — and ultimately, to

¹⁸⁰ Haught, *The New Cosmic Story: Inside Our Awakening Universe*, 107.

mythic conceptions of an eschatological telos that are ultimately unharmonious with the adventure of the cosmos as articulated by contemporary cosmology and Whiteheadian philosophy. However, the seeds of evolutionary language are there, and indeed intended by the alternative orthodoxy, especially as it will be explored by its further conception of ‘nondualism.’ This study’s emphasis is intended to be more on the connections and novel possibilities for deeper resonance than the semantics, although all aspects matter in some way for the effective communication of an overall scheme that invites the adventure of becoming. Perhaps, from a process perspective, even the telic ‘goodness’ purported by Rohr in the above quote is not some final good, but rather the inherent, cumulative good of Whitehead’s self-realizing advancing world of value.

One book that has conglomerated the ramifications of the theory of evolution for religious people in the postmodern world is author Carter Phipps’ *Evolutionaries: Unlocking the Spiritual and Cultural Potential of Science’s Greatest Idea*. In it, Phipps has taken quite seriously the very motive nature of evolution, and has applied it to the directionality and novelty that this theory provides its adherents. He begins by stating that:

Evolution is a fact...there is no controversy. I would say that I believe in evolution, only I don’t think belief has anything to do with it. We don’t say we believe the world is round — we know it is. Evolution is not a matter of faith; it is a matter of evidence, painstaking work, and breakthrough science. Any other conclusion stretches the bounds of credibility and retards the advance of knowledge. Evolution is simply true.¹⁸¹

This no-nonsense beginning to his incorporation of evolutionary theory into spheres outside of science sensibly moves the conversation around evolution forward toward novel cultural and

¹⁸¹ Carter Phipps, *Evolutionaries: Unlocking the Spiritual and Cultural Potential of Science’s Greatest Idea* (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 2012), 7-8.

spiritual possibilities which lie on the other side of this ‘greatest idea’. In essence, Phipps is affirming that there *is no going back, there is only a moving forward*. While this assertion may be commonplace for some religious people who have found evolutionary theory to be an obvious conclusion, many in both religious and scientific spheres continue, steeped in their own reductionisms, to tend toward the exclusion of the other from both sides. Here, Phipps quips that “Once we truly begin to appreciate the evolutionary nature of even a universal phenomenon like religion, we can begin to see how regrettable it is that so many scholars, especially scientists, tend to think about it as a single phenomenon, as if most of human history can be broken down into a simple two-step affair.”¹⁸² Phipps instead views the phenomenon of religion as a universal affair with an interior dimension not dissimilar to that described by Haught — one whose evolution in this moment also opens up new spiritual possibilities for a generation of Evolutionaries.

Phipps also ties evolution to spirituality in such a way that there is a sort of spiritual or conscious evolution available within both the religious and enlightenment cultures of our time. He notes “If spirituality wants to be more than a respite from the world, more than alternative to the cares and conundrums of life as it marches by at a distance, it must change...it must discover a new relationship between the insights that lie beyond time and the world that marches forward *in* time.”¹⁸³ This strikingly Whiteheadian statement begs at a new marriage — not only of the wisdom of spiritual enlightenment traditions and evolutionary theory, but also of an evolutionary

¹⁸² Phipps, *Evolutionaries: Unlocking the Spiritual and Cultural Potential of Science’s Greatest Idea*, 288.

¹⁸³ Phipps, *Evolutionaries: Unlocking the Spiritual and Cultural Potential of Science’s Greatest Idea*, 325, italics Phipps’.

spirituality that connects the spatiotemporal world with the realm of becoming outside of time in a new, embodied spiritual praxis. Along these lines, Phipps views spirituality as a future-oriented, lived expression in line with this thesis' articulation of the adventure of becoming. The beauty of Phipps' thesis is that he allows for Whitehead's own notion of creative advance to inform his understanding of this movement of Evolutionaries. Along these lines, his Evolutionaries are not yet another abstraction to be frozen in time, nor does he prescribe or predict some telic expression as to exactly how they will enfold their evolutionary spiritualities. Rather, he calls them diverse "pilgrims of the future," whose "destination is not a physical place but a psychic, cultural, and cosmic possibility — the as-yet-unrealized potential of the future."¹⁸⁴ In this alluring description of a posture of openness, one may begin to grasp a deeper sense of the ceaseless, creative beckoning of a cosmos luring human beings toward a religion of becoming.

A Religion of Becoming — Nondual Resonances

Religion is a posture of bounded boundlessness — a relational beyondness. When one seriously considers the implications of a process philosophy of science that embraces a kind of creative advance in this cosmos of events in which the religious dimension of life has developed in the universe's own interiority, one eventually comes to realize that — as aforementioned in the previous section — religious movements such as Christianity have not as easily incorporated this epistemological shift into its own framework and praxis. The truth is, what we have observed thus far in this study is that nature is thoroughly nondual — that is, it is an organism of becoming

¹⁸⁴ Phipps, *Evolutionaries: Unlocking the Spiritual and Cultural Potential of Science's Greatest Idea*, 367.

multiplicity that is never static, always superjecting beyond itself. This is seen in contemporary cosmology, such as that explored with Carlo Rovelli, which he names as ‘paradox,’ which carries connotations with it of differentiation rather than unity. Rovelli writes:

There’s a paradox at the heart of our understanding of the physical world...the paradox is that both theories [general relativity and quantum mechanics] work remarkably well. Nature is behaving with us like that elderly rabbi to whom two men went in order to settle a dispute. Having listened to the first, the rabbi says: ‘You are in the right.’ The second insists on being heard. The rabbi listens to him and says: ‘You’re also right.’ Having overheard them from the next room, the rabbi’s wife then calls out, ‘But they can’t *both* be in the right!’ The rabbi reflects and nods before concluding: ‘And you’re right too!’¹⁸⁵

This short religious parable is a nondual way that this quantum theorist talks about reality.

Whereas many physicists are attempting to figure out a way to bring general relativity and quantum mechanics together (and the jury is still out as to the correct interpretation of how to do so), Rovelli allows there to be room for both theories to vibrate on their own. This invitation to see reality from the point of a rightness beyond sides is a way for Rovelli to call those who peer at the cosmos from within the cosmos to something higher than reductionistic rationalizations about what reality *actually* is, and instead to speculate while holding the tension of our time that allows for an affirmation beyond singular rightness — indeed, this allows for a wider perspective that can see past dualisms, binaries, and bifurcations of every kind in order to hold a wider harmony in place. This is an invitation to begin seeing in a nondual way — one that is surrational, not pre-rational, post-rational, or rational to the point of misplaced concreteness. And, to arrive here from speculation derived from science and philosophy rather than religion is quite the initiation to nonduality! And yet still, this way of talking about reality jives with the

¹⁸⁵ Rovelli, *Seven Brief Lessons on Physics*, 40, italics Rovelli’s.

migratory nature of our religious times. As mentioned in the introduction, we live in a time where more and more young people are becoming disinterested in religion, but are still carrying a spiritual hunger. In essence, many people are on their way to somewhere new, embracing *the journey as a sort of new location* for religious reflection, while carrying a deep sense that many people know more of what they *don't* know/believe/think of their existence than what they *do* know/believe/think of their existence. It strikes me that this has provided a novel opportunity to call people to a nondual posture of religious becoming for our times.

For instance, in commenting on the interpretation of the Christian tradition through a biblical lens, Clayton and Knapp have noted that, “None of the records that has come down to us was directly produced by anyone who actually knew the rabbi, Jesus of Nazareth, during his earthly life. And the records themselves differ in striking ways both in the events they recount and the interpretations they place on those events.”¹⁸⁶ Thus, what they are implying here is that it is near impossible given a historical critical study of the Bible to arrive at the exact words of Jesus, let alone something like the propositional heart of biblical truth. In essence, what can be seen in the contrasting accounts of events in the Bible is an evolving narrative tradition in which there doesn't have to be exact factual representation in the historical events themselves in order for them to be expressing something beautiful and even true about our evolving world. Although there has been a stream of the Christian tradition that has been more open to metaphor, mysticism, and the notion of historical evolution of truth — namely the Eastern Christian spiritual heritage, with some smaller threads in the Western stream embracing them as well — for the most part the empiric Christianity of the West influenced by the enlightenment has had a

¹⁸⁶ Clayton and Knapp, *The Predicament of Belief: Science, Philosophy, Faith*, 11.

difficult time adjusting its teaching, language, and praxis to this nondual way of thinking.

Clayton and Knapp advocate for a sort of Christian minimalism given the reality of science and philosophy in our time that holds out nonfat possibility as well. By this, they express that:

The kind of minimalist we have in mind, in contrast, holds Christian beliefs that are significantly constrained by philosophical objections and contemporary scientific consensus (which distinguishes her from more conservative evangelical or neo-orthodox believers) but also holds beliefs that, despite those constraints, she has reason to think do justice to the received testimony of the Christian tradition (which sets her apart from liberal believers in the sense just defined).¹⁸⁷

Here, Clayton and Knapp are advocating for a minimalism that is constrained by philosophy and science, but still allows for a practitioner of the Christian religion to retain beliefs that place them in the historic line of the evolving tradition. While I appreciate their naming of certain constraints that philosophy and science have put of particular Western Christian beliefs and affirmations, I wonder if there is actually a sort of novel opening up of the evolution of the tradition that philosophy and science are also helping bring to birth.

Perhaps science and philosophy are pushing practitioners of the Christian religion toward its mystical roots — toward a sort of nondual embodiment that moves toward the unitive rather than the constrained. While the nature of the post-enlightenment coercive ‘belief-based’ mentality of Western Christianity has placed the emphasis on ‘coming to faith’ via the road of affirming propositional truth claims as extracted from one certain hermeneutical interpretation of the biblical texts, perhaps this religious milieu in which there is a confluence of science, philosophy, and religion is one in which the affective combination of those three disciplines has created a new invitation to an old way of seeing — a surreational, nondual invitation toward

¹⁸⁷ Clayton and Knapp, *The Predicament of Belief: Science, Philosophy, Faith*, 18.

harmony rather than atonality. Perhaps this is an invitation to a way of practicing the Christian religion in a completely nondual way. Whereas Western ‘belief’ allows those who affirm faith propositions to practice their faith in an almost disembodied state — meaning, that their affirmations in the ideological realm don’t actually affect or transform their lived experience, but rather provide them with the security of an ‘afterlife,’ thus keeping them from deepening lived practices — a more mystical, experiential, affective invitation to a nondual posture of de/constructive saying, unsaying, and saying again invites us into an adventure of becoming in which all our religious ideas, truths, liturgies, and practices begin to be cast in a new light — one that fully embraces the processual nature of the cosmos of which we are tiny drops. The religious sense heretofore developed is one in which an interior experience of one’s own place in the grand nature of things catalyzes a deeper cultivation of one’s connectivity with the external world of causal efficacy. In essence, we are called to hold all things together — life and death, spirit and matter, soul and body, head and heart, and the list goes on. This nondual, unitive call from within the emerging cosmos births in the center of the person a religious sense of awe, wonder, care, and compassion for life — indeed of the exuberance of a cosmos spilling over with life, and allows for Christians to take their beliefs to new horizons of expression.

Defining Nonduality — Western and Eastern Harmonies

The term ‘nondual’ has been used throughout this study to describe not only the nature of reality, but also the deeper invitation to a posture of nonduality in the lived expression of persons seeking Beauty and Peace. Just what the nature of this term ‘nondual’ has meant in the contemplative Christian stream of the Center for Action and Contemplation has been addressed

thoroughly by faculty member, author, and Episcopal priest Cynthia Bourgeault in her book entitled, *The Heart of Centering Prayer: Nondual Christianity in Theory and Practice*. In it, she explores the origins and nuances of the word as it applies to the contemplative Christian stream of the West. She begins by stating that:

Christians are largely clueless about what's actually involved here [with the word nondual] and use the term in a variety of confused and contradictory ways. The confusion may be attributable in large part to the fact that 'nondual' is a relative newcomer to the Western spiritual lexicon, having gained widespread currency only in the latter half of the century along with the emergence of inter spiritual dialogue and those poplar contemporary maps of the levels of consciousness as articulated by Ken Wilber, Spiral Dynamics, and others. In the more familiar Christian road map, which guided spiritual progress in both Christian East and Christian West for more than a millennium, the traditional way of designating that upper echelon of spiritual attainment would have been 'unitive' (as in 'purgative,' 'illuminative,' an 'unitive' ways). But it is a fundamental miscalculation to assume that these terms equate directly, since the measuring rods used to determine them are so very different.¹⁸⁸

Her first comment here is that the term 'nondual' can be initially confusing for Western people, and her first delineation is that the term 'nondual' does not immediately equal the term 'unitive' in any particular way — as the term 'unitive' is used to describe a level of spiritual attainment in the historic Christian mystical path, while the term 'nondual' is much broader. Bourgeault next rightly asks the following clarifying questions about what exactly the term 'nondual' represents in the following exploration:

There is a general, vague agreement that 'nondual' has something to do with 'no separation.' But what does this mean exactly? Does it equate to a mystical experience ('Make me one with everything!'), a philosophical monism ('It's all one!'), a transcendence of polarity, or an elimination of polarity? Does it imply a permanent state of bliss or equanimity, or 'merely' — as Bede Griffiths once famously suggested — the capacity to remain awake, present in *all* states? Can you still *think* in a nondual way, or is that an oxymoron? Is it the same thing as 'permanent enlightenment'? The falling away

¹⁸⁸ Cynthia Bourgeault, *The Heart of Centering Prayer: Nondual Christianity in Theory and Practice* (Boulder, CO: Shambhala Publications, 2016), 3.

of self? And if so, who would be the exemplars of this state in the Christian lineage? Is it the rare attainment of a saint, or an increasingly common phenomenon as civilization converges upon a new evolutionary leap?¹⁸⁹

These qualifiers continue to help distill the meaning of the term ‘nondual’ in a clarifying manner.

Bourgeault aligns the term ‘nondual’ with its various applications and implications in different streams of thought and praxis: mysticism, philosophy, polarity, enlightenment, rationality, religion, and even psychology. Given her background as a practitioner of the contemplative Christian tradition and religion, she tends toward an interpretation of the ‘nondual’ that has an embodied, practical component to it as she goes as far as discussing the neurobiological implications of the theory of nonduality. Along these lines, she pens:

Whatever nondual may look like when approached through the metaphysical and spiritual filters classically used to describe it, *neurologically, the capacity to perceive reality in this way depends on a new way of organizing the perceptual field* — an upgrade in the operating system, if you will. Basically, the essence of the nondual is a quantitative change not in the object of perception but in the *mechanics* of perception. Rather than ‘perception through differentiation’ (the programming used by the cognitive mind), one begins to perceive through *holographic resonance* — the capacity to sense the whole pattern as a single unified field. Of course one then ‘sees *from* wholeness’ (i.e., nonseparation).¹⁹⁰

Here, Bourgeault begins to explore what the implications are of nondual theory and praxis as they apply to the body — namely, that the practice of nonduality forges a new way of organizing one’s perceptual field, which fundamentally changes the way one experiences their relationality. Restated in process terms, the posture of nonduality is a bodily posture of attentiveness in one’s subjective experience in such a manner that is open to the creative

¹⁸⁹ Bourgeault, *The Heart of Centering Prayer: Nondual Christianity in Theory and Practice*, 4.

¹⁹⁰ Bourgeault, *The Heart of Centering Prayer: Nondual Christianity in Theory and Practice*, 5, italics Bourgeault’s.

transformation of one's experience, which expressly reconfigures one's perceptual field toward a larger space for the unified field, which is the love of multiplicity in which the many become one and are increased by one. It is partially this contribution to the conversation around nonduality that Bourgeault offers as her innovation. Later, she will go on to explain the ramifications of such a claim, but before she moves in that direction, she expands more on the Western tradition of nonduality by framing it as an 'evolutionary advance' in the history of our world — one which places its emphasis on a sort of 'heart attention.' She reflects:

The West's particular contribution to the understanding of nonduality has been, I believe, to intuit that this evolutionary advance is somehow connected to 'putting the mind in the heart' — a phrase which leaps from page after page of Orthodox accounts of this transformation and is also detectable, though in more obscure form, in the mystical writings of the Christian West.¹⁹¹

Here, Bourgeault notes that although Western mysticism intuited it, this path of the head descending into the heart is more common in the Orthodox accounts of transformation. She admits that this is a bit of a forcing of the fit of the term nondual into the ethos of the West, but she clarifies the distinction she is making by describing that:

In the East, the experience tends to be monistic, of what Wilber calls an 'I/I' realization. One discovers one's own deepest essence and nature as *identical* with that Oneness, that ground luminosity, that unitive field — 'I am that.' In the West, the unitive state is always looked upon as *relational*: a mystical marriage, in which one is fully joined to God in love, subsumed in God through that love. But one does not *become* God; and nondual realization is always one of union ('two become one'), not identity. This imparts a distinctly different feeling tone to the unitive experience of the West.¹⁹²

¹⁹¹ Bourgeault, *The Heart of Centering Prayer: Nondual Christianity in Theory and Practice*, 5.

¹⁹² Bourgeault, *The Heart of Centering Prayer: Nondual Christianity in Theory and Practice*, 47, italics Bourgeault's.

This contrast is important to note, however, it is also possible that both the Eastern experience of the I/I realization and the Western experience of the I/Thou relationship are articulations of the same phenomenon, as applied through different conceptualizations of reality. In the Western articulation, one does not become God, as Bourgeault notes, however one does have a sort of unitive experience where two become one, as she explains. The difference here is subtle, but real. It is the difference, perhaps, between a panentheistic conception of divine reality and a pantheistic conception of divine reality — the former meaning that there is some part of God that transcends the world, and not the other way around, whereas the latter symbolizes an experience that one's deepest essence *is* that all-encompassing reality. Different Whiteheadians parse out their concepts of divine reality differently, and many across the spectrum are still considered 'Western' in the sense heretofore discussed. No matter how one conceives of divine reality, however, or doesn't, the phenomenological experience is consonant with both articulations from the East and West. With a process philosophical framing, it may even be possible so as to not have to choose between the Eastern and Western readings, and rather, in saying that as the many become one and are increased by one, that the I/I experience and the I/Thou experience are both correct (is there anything more nondual?) and are together subsumed in the experience of the nondual creative advance of the uni-verse. In any case, Bourgeault here eventually brings nonduality into conversation in its Western context, and in so doing, has brought it into harmony with Western scientific discoveries from the neurosciences. Along these lines, she explains her own working definition of nonduality in Western context — indeed the context of The Center for Action and Contemplation in which her understanding of nonduality is applied. She writes her definition as an invitation to imagine an alternative way of seeing:

Imagine that there might be a different way of structuring the field of perception, an alternative way of wiring the brain that did not depend on that initial bifurcation of the perceptual field into inside and outside, subject and object. Instead, one would grasp the entire pattern as a whole — holographically — through a perceptual modality quantitatively more immediate and sensate, working on vibrational resonance rather than mental abstraction. Then one would indeed experience that signature sense of oneness — not, however, because one had broken into a whole new realm of spiritual experience, but because that tedious, ‘translator’ mechanism of the reflective brain has finally been superseded. You see oneness because you see *from* oneness. This would be my own working definition of nonduality¹⁹³

The critical emphases in her definition of nonduality here are on both embodiment and oneness, and the challenge is to work to shift one’s perceptive field where one begins to ‘see from oneness’ in this sense. This unitive frame for Western nonduality is one which challenges its practitioners to cultivate a connection with a new field of perception that works on a ‘vibrational resonance’ rather than on mental abstraction.

This kind of language vibrates with Whitehead’s theory of prehension, which includes both physical and mental prehensions and which advocates for something like pre-bodily feeling and sense perception that prefigures the interpretation or abstraction of the mind’s own categorization of an object. This is often referred to in process terminology as the world of presentational immediacy that is presymbolic. From this place, Bourgeault describes poetically, that:

It is possible to look upon the world from a nondual vantage point and still affirm the reality of change, movement, and the structures in which the formless so marvelously drapes itself; one simply sees them from the perspective of oneness. There is no implicit need to reduce multiplicity to a primal unity in order to lay claim to nondual perception.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ Bourgeault, *The Heart of Centering Prayer: Nondual Christianity in Theory and Practice*, 49-50, italics Bourgeault’s.

¹⁹⁴ Bourgeault, *The Heart of Centering Prayer: Nondual Christianity in Theory and Practice*, 52.

Here, she makes a really beautiful distinction that is harmonious with the claims of Sections I and II in this study. She affirms here that it is possible to inhabit a nondual perspective, while affirming the reality of process. Clearly, she has worked through the implications of the claims of nonduality as they relate to her own philosophical perspective. This admission alone leaves enough room for there to be a way beyond the perennial, analogical trapping of much of the mystical tradition. As she invites nondual practitioners into the posture of cultivating a deep shift in their field of perception — this new way of seeing from oneness — she is implying that the affects of this shift are both cumulative and corporeal. Bourgeault’s articulation of nonduality is thus, in a sense, an organizing principle that allows persons in polyphilic bodies to shift their perceptual field in such a way that they can experience the relationality of their own becoming in a deeper and more unitive way that places them in the direct flow with the mystagogy of becoming advocated for by Faber’s Whiteheadian perspective, which will shield them from the wound of passage, which is the wound of abstraction, of misplaced concreteness. Thus, this type of claim allows Bourgeault to say that “Both traditions [Eastern and Western] hint at a permanent, irreversible shift in the seat of selfhood and in the perceptual field that flows out from this new identity.”¹⁹⁵ Although the substantive language of the ‘seat of selfhood’ alludes to a potentially more materialist reading of Bourgeault’s concept of selfhood, it is likely only a semantic distinction given her affirmation of nondual cultivation as harmonious with becoming, and thus it is possible that this permanent, irreversible shift in perception is one which the khoric self can come to full bloom as it participates in this endeavor. In her comment about not needing

¹⁹⁵ Bourgeault, *The Heart of Centering Prayer: Nondual Christianity in Theory and Practice*, 46.

to reduce multiplicity to a primal unity, she resists the urge to hold to substantialist language attributed to the classical conception of the eternal Soul, and instead puts forth a pluriform definition of nonduality that pushes at the boundaries of contemporary cosmology in the process in its embrace of multiplicity.

Centering Prayer — The Praxis of Nondual Cultivation as a Mystagogy of Becoming

As we have explored the multifaceted uses of nonduality in the Western tradition through the lens of the cultivation of nondual perception, its obvious resultant qualities in one's perspective are the other modes associated with Bourgeault's initial exploration of nonduality: nonpolarization, mystical experience, unitive attainment, as a shift in one's religious perspective, etc. Her advocacy for the neuroscientific element associated with nonduality is perhaps the deeper function of the general practice of nonduality that informs all other nondual residual effects. Centering Prayer is a methodology that was popularized by Fr. Thomas Keating, a Trappist Monk, and is now practiced by many Christians and spiritual seekers across the globe; and is taught and practiced expressly by The Center for Action and Contemplation. As Bourgeault describes the practice, she writes:

Learning Centering Prayer begins with *unlearning* most of what you think meditation is all about:

- Centering Prayer is not about attaining a state of bliss, peace, or stillness.
- It's not about developing 'single-pointed concentration.'
- It's not about establishing a steady 'I am' or witnessing presence.
- It's not about reducing stress or improving physical or emotional wellness (although these are indeed common side effects).
- It's not about receiving messages from God.

What is it about, then?

Basically, the method of Centering Prayer consists in learning to withdraw attention from our thoughts — those incessant creations of our busy minds — in order to rest in a gentle, open attentiveness to divine reality itself.¹⁹⁶

Centering Prayer is thus presented not as some general form of meditation, but rather as a specified methodology that seeks to train its participants in something decidedly particular — the aforementioned cultivation of a sort of seeing from oneness. This is an inherent overcoming of Whitehead's fallacy of misplaced concreteness, in which one abstraction from the process is held up and made into some sort of ultimate. Bourgeault's apophatic explanation of the practice from the perspective of what it *is not*, is thus helpful because it clarifies and distills the heart of Centering Prayer as an alternative form of meditation to its contemplative counterparts. She goes a bit further to describe the theopoetic nature of meditation in the following passage:

When you sit in meditation, you are actually presenting yourself as an icon of one of the most archetypal and noble of human activities: communion with the infinite. Being aware of the natural dignity and beauty of this archetype will help your own body find its place more easily, and it will also be of substantial help to everybody else when you meditate in a group.¹⁹⁷

This element of 'communion with the infinite' is not dissimilar to Faber's mystagogy of becoming or of passage as earlier described. It is a sort of way of affirming-in-praxis the adventure of becoming that is the title of this study. Although the emphasis in this practice is not necessarily a direct reflection on one's own becoming, its heart is one of a communitive becoming one with the infinite of becomings, which we have observed in both contemporary physics and philosophy of science to be processual. This 'infinite,' if it does not signify the

¹⁹⁶ Bourgeault, *The Heart of Centering Prayer: Nondual Christianity in Theory and Practice*, 13, italics Bourgeault's.

¹⁹⁷ Bourgeault, *The Heart of Centering Prayer: Nondual Christianity in Theory and Practice*, 25.

analogical eternal present, can be transfigured as one of a Whiteheadian mutual immanence and mutual transcendence that that is the infinite dance of the creative polyphilic God-world relationship. Centering prayer is thus a path within the contemplative Christian stream that leads to deep communion with this multiplicitous, nondual reality.

The method of Centering Prayer consists of a fourfold strategy for posturing oneself in this way that cultivates nonduality:

- “1. Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your willingness to consent to God’s presence and action within.
2. Sitting comfortable and with eyes closed, settle briefly and silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God’s presence and action within.
3. When engaged with your thoughts, return ever so gently to the sacred word.
4. At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.”¹⁹⁸

It needs to be noted here that this is not an encouragement to incarnate a repetition prayer. The sacred word is merely a reminder to return to that place of subjective experience (traditionally called heart) that is beyond the dualizing abstractions of the mind-process. Bourgeault refers to this as “Being able to hold your attention as a tensile field of awareness,” and she employs the Rumi metaphor of the “quivering drop of mercury” to describe this sensation in Centering Prayer.¹⁹⁹ Her ‘four R’s’ for ensuring this movement is not about repetition are “Resist no thought. Retain no thought. React to no thought. Return ever so gently to the sacred word.”²⁰⁰ The sacred word (as itself a thought) is thus merely a placeholder for one’s focus of attention. It

¹⁹⁸ Bourgeault, *The Heart of Centering Prayer: Nondual Christianity in Theory and Practice*, 29.

¹⁹⁹ Bourgeault, *The Heart of Centering Prayer: Nondual Christianity in Theory and Practice*, 31.

²⁰⁰ Bourgeault, *The Heart of Centering Prayer: Nondual Christianity in Theory and Practice*, 32.

should be spoken and let go of immediately as a motion of return. In fact, sacred words such as these are sacred in the mystical tradition only if they become so much a part of one's essence that they ultimately become lost in the end. They are a means and not an end. Normally, this practice is suggested for a length of twenty minutes twice per day. And, it really is that simple! The deepest stream of this practice is consent or permission — which is openness, freedom, relationality, a yes-posture to one's own becoming connectivity. In this posture, Bourgeault describes that “You, God, and the world ‘out there’ are not separate entities, but flow together seamlessly in an unbreakable dynamism of self-giving love, which is the true nature of reality and the ground of everything.”²⁰¹ This is the inseparable flow of Whitehead's nondual conception of reality-in-becoming, this ‘self-giving love’ that Bourgeault refers to is one that is the nature of the creativity that has lured cosmic process to its novel iterations, and is the environment in which human beings have emerged and now seek Peace in the becoming. In fact, Bourgeault describes this practice of Centering Prayer as a sort of awakening (notice the gerund) the heart in saying: “Awakening the heart, or the spiritualized mind, is an unlimited process of making the mind more sensitive, focused, energized, subtle, and refined, of joining it to its cosmic milieu, the infinity of love.”²⁰² Here, she refers to the practice of Centering Prayer as an ‘unlimited process’ wherein, in quite processual terms, “Feeling is a form of knowing.”²⁰³ The coincidence is not lost in this study.

²⁰¹ Bourgeault, *The Heart of Centering Prayer: Nondual Christianity in Theory and Practice*, 39.

²⁰² Bourgeault, *The Heart of Centering Prayer: Nondual Christianity in Theory and Practice*, 55.

²⁰³ Bourgeault, *The Heart of Centering Prayer: Nondual Christianity in Theory and Practice*, 64-65.

The deep resonance of this practice of Centering Prayer as a conduit for the cultivation of nonduality, both neurobiologically and methodologically — both as ways of seeing or experiencing — is a novel vibration for the postmodern world of religious plurality where cosmic consciousness is among us. For those seeking a dimension of Christian religious observance in their day-to-day living that places them at the heart of aliveness, nondual contemplation in the way of Centering Prayer is both harmonious and efficacious — especially for those navigating the surly dynamics of the postmodern religious landscape — with its relativism that is begging for a harmonious uniting of particulars. Centering Prayer is itself a way also toward the overcoming of various bifurcations and dualisms as, “It does incrementally develop an ability to hold attention as a unified field rather than a subject/object polarity,”²⁰⁴ and thus, with Whitehead, restores subjective experience to the whole of things. The postmodern, increasingly secular milieu needs a nondual methodology for a nondual reality that is thoroughly scientific, surrational, and practical. It needs also to be resonant with contemporary conceptions of personhood, such as that of Whitehead’s nonsubstantialist conception of the khoric soul in which a practice like Centering Prayer “lays down a strong practical foundation for making the transition from a narrative sense of selfhood into the ‘creative freedom’ of the unitive self.”²⁰⁵ And, for those awakening to the deeply religious sensibilities continuing to emerge in the interiority of an awakening cosmos-in-becoming who are looking to transcend the Christianity handed down by modernity, with its mechanicism and its dualisms, while holding to its narrative

²⁰⁴ Bourgeault, *The Heart of Centering Prayer: Nondual Christianity in Theory and Practice*, 93.

²⁰⁵ Bourgeault, *The Heart of Centering Prayer: Nondual Christianity in Theory and Practice*, 93.

core, nondual contemplation offers a path toward communion with nondual reality — toward a mystagogy of becoming for spiritual but not religious people with a Christian sacred canopy.

Centering Prayer is the type of prayer advocated for by Haught also in his anticipatory posture of becoming, which frames his opinion that: “Prayer would mean that we would have to wait patiently for a newness of being along with a deeper intelligibility to which we do not yet have access. Prayer would entail giving primacy to the not-yet over the has-been and the is-now.”²⁰⁶

And ultimately, in this process toward deeper nonduality, the wider resonance is that the practice itself strikes a chord with the nondual nature of a reality itself in becoming — itself in process.

This last charge from Cynthia Bourgeault from the end of *The Heart of Centering Prayer*:

Nondual Christianity in Theory and Practice serves as a sort of closing affirmation of the harmonious endeavor in this study:

Another growing edge for an upcoming generation of Centering Prayer lies in the need for an updated and expanded understanding of personhood that matches the nondual trajectory of this prayer...Since Centering Prayer is headed toward nondual selfhood, anyway, it becomes paramount for a next generation of teachers to begin to set in place the conceptual framework to support this transition, including a greater attention on witnessing presence, objectless attention, and the capacity to live fully and wisely beyond personal storytelling and drama.²⁰⁷

My hope is that the conceptual framework here laid out has accomplished the challenge set out by Bourgeault in the above quote to support this transition in thinking about nondual selfhood, and that it offers those traversing the postmodern religious landscape an invitation to a mystagogy of becoming in which deeper communion with an enfolding multiplicity is always available in the adventure of becoming.

²⁰⁶ Haught, *The New Cosmic Story: Inside Our Awakening Universe*, 195.

²⁰⁷ Bourgeault, *The Heart of Centering Prayer: Nondual Christianity in Theory and Practice*, 205.

Wholing — The Beauty-full Peace of Passage

Contemplation opens us to a deep sense of Beauty in our subjective experience — one in which Goodness and Truth are components, but not the widest field. When we open ourselves to the experience of Beauty in contemplation, we automatically open ourselves to an experience of our truest selves, which are inherently good by inference. I sometimes refer to this process as a “coming back to creatureliness.” It is a sort of digging out space within ourselves to experience the restful place of our natural beauty once again. It is a coming to know the Truth and Beauty of our inherent Goodness on a deeper, more intrinsic level that ultimately cannot be removed. It is not an experience of a title spoken over oneself, but rather a creaturely sense of some natural, emerging interior reality of Beauty — a benevolent reality that comes from deep within our becoming. This inherent Beauty is the aim not only of the universe in its “horizon of rightness” as Haught refers to it, but it is also the aim of every moment of our individual and collective becoming in Faber’s mystagogy of passage. Haught goes further in using Whiteheadian categories to discuss Beauty himself in adding that:

Beauty is the harmony of contrasts, the ordering of novelty, the unifying of multiplicity, the gathering of diversity into deeper relationship. This, at heart, may be what the universe is all about. I believe that in an unfinished universe, without the slightest conflict with science, people of many faiths might now agree that the ultimate aim of everything is beauty.²⁰⁸

It cannot be stated more simply than that. That is the claim that this thesis shares. The ruminating question of this mystical hope in which the ‘ultimate aim of everything is Beauty’ is, with its inherent ephemerality, how can we find Peace in the passage? Well, we need look not any further than Whitehead’s own formulation:

²⁰⁸ Haught, *The New Cosmic Story: Inside Our Awakening Universe*, 140.

Peace...is a positive feeling which crowns the 'life and motion' of the soul...It is not a hope for the future, nor is it an interest in present details. It is a broadening of feeling due to the emergence of some deep metaphysical insight, un verbalized and yet momentous in its coordination of values.²⁰⁹

This positive feeling is the Peace of a Soul-in-motion — a broadening of one's own sense of self toward relationality — it is the feeling of interconnection, of oneness in multiplicity.

As explored toward the end of Section I, Peace is directly tied to Whitehead's value theory in which Beauty is the aim of every event. For those who are seeking some sense of respite for their lives in their migration from the static and substantive truth claims of belief-based Western Christianity as a center for hope and peace toward a religious adventure of becoming in which there is a process-relational cosmos of ephemeral Beauty, the earliest experience is often a sense of unease at the early stages of the journey. As the prior proposition-based Peace of their earlier stage of faith that was once held with firm grasp has now slipped through their fingers, many arrive at this place of becoming with a sense of unease as to how to cultivate a deep sense of Peace in the becoming without an eschatological horizon or omega point. The above Whitehead quote from *Adventures of Ideas* provides some clues as to how one can arrive at that deeper place of respite amongst a world of flux. Here, Whitehead advocates that Peace is a positive feeling which results from a deep metaphysical insight (like that of the process-relational cosmos of events) that comes to 'crown the life and motion of the soul.' This passage implies that when one comes to some deeper understanding of the motive nature of things, one has a broadening of feeling in which the Peace they come to experience is a wider harmony of a life in flux — it is wider precisely because it is a Peace resultant of the creative

²⁰⁹ Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 285.

advance of a life, a wider Peace than the narrow peace that is the result of the assertion of some propositional belief that provides (un)certain hope for the future. In essence, Whitehead's Peace is the Peace of process — the Peace of flow — the Peace of becoming, which is, as he says, not a Peace that is in the details of the urgent now (for again, there is only a nowing), but rather that is located in a fundamentally wider embrace of the flux of things. This Peace, due to its intrinsic connection with Whitehead's concept of Beauty, is the value of passage. Faber has called this sort of relational Peace a 'dispossessing peace' in the following statement: "Against the 'wound of things' — their *relationless isolation*, their *suppressive exclusion*, their *occupying stabilization*, and their *relentless violence* — we seek perikhoric relationality, creative difference, and dispossessing 'peace.'"²¹⁰ The wound of things is, in essence, trying to abstract one's being from the flow of passage. Thus, what Faber is describing here is a sense of Peace that comes from the dispossession of holding on to our lives in any one instance of becoming. This is something beyond 'isolation, stabilization, exclusion, and violence, which are the road toward unrest. Rather, in a process-relationality that welcomes the new, and the difference of creativity, we come to a deeper, wider, more expansive Peace that is the Peace of process; it's just that, to get there we have to dispossess our lives — our grasp on stasis and egoic self, which is the tragically beautiful element of this perspective beyond becoming and perishing. Along these lines, Haught comments similarly in his anticipatory approach that, "To anticipation, no less than analogy, the meaning of our lives has to do with our awakening to rightness. But in the case of anticipation meaning comes from opening ourselves, as part of an unfinished universe, to the full

²¹⁰ Faber, *The Divine Manifold*, 329.

arrival of rightness from up ahead rather than just from up above.”²¹¹ Here Haught explores the implications of a religion of becoming that emphasizes an eager anticipation of that which is ‘to come,’ and in fact, attributes meaning with our awakening to this emerging fullness from ‘up ahead’ (in the sequence of events), not ‘up above.’ This rightness — which is the harmonic realization of the value of Beauty — this meaning through a process-lens can be cast as a sort of purpose or meaning found in the anticipatory posture of a life that both welcomes the arrival of novel Beauty and culminates in the feeling of Peace — the Peace of passage. This is also the Peace of a nondual perspective that verges on the edge of faith — a faith that passage is also a sort of ‘wholing.’ For, wholing is ultimately a unification — a bringing together of things. Wholing is similar to the ‘Oneing’ of The Center for Action and Contemplation’s journal title as borrowed from mystic Julian of Norwich, but here ‘wholing’ implies not only the bringing together of two becoming ‘one,’ but also the finality of completeness that that sort of unity provides — a wholeness that *is* the whole — the multiplicity of becoming expressions of value, life, and Beauty that is the harmonic refrain of the cosmos — that is itself an adventure of becoming.

²¹¹ Haught, *The New Cosmic Story: Inside Our Awakening Universe*, 64.

Chapter V: Divine Poiesis After the Death of God

Throughout this exposition of the philosophy of organism we have been considering the primary action of God on the world. From this point of view, he is the principle of concretion — the principle whereby there is initiated a definite outcome from a situation otherwise riddled with ambiguity. Thus, so far, the primordial side of the nature of God has alone been relevant. But God, as well as being primordial, is also consequent. He is the beginning and the end. He is not the beginning in the sense of being in the past of all members. He is the presupposed actuality of conceptual operation, in unison of becoming with every other creative act.

— Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*²¹²

The consequent nature of God is his judgment on the world. He saves the world as it passes into the immediacy of his own life. It is the judgment of a tenderness which loses nothing that can be saved...another image which is also required to understand his consequent nature is that of his infinite patience. The universe includes a threefold creative act composed of (i) the one infinite conceptual realization, (ii) the multiple solidarity of free physical realizations in the temporal world, (iii) the ultimate unity of the multiplicity of actual fact with the primordial conceptual fact...God's role is not the combat of productive force with productive force, of destructive force with destructive force; it lies in the patient operation of overpowering rationality of his conceptual harmonization. He does not create the world, he saves it: or more accurately, he is the poet of the world, with tender patience leading it by his vision of truth, beauty, and goodness.

— Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*²¹³

At this point in the thesis, we have played with a Whiteheadian cosmology in conversation with Carlo Rovelli's poetic theoretical physics in order to lead into a contemplative praxis in which one can participate both prayerfully and intentionally in the collective adventure of becoming that includes the emerging religious interiority of a becoming universe. However, one subject has been implied in this process, and not yet properly addressed. We now turn toward

²¹² Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 345, italics mine. As a result of the time in which Whitehead wrote, Whitehead's language about God was still steeped in the masculine. It is expressly denied by this thesis that God is relegated to male pronouns in any way.

²¹³ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 346, italics mine.

the reality of God. We have come to God in a sort of winding, backwards, and roundabout way when contrasted with the theologies of modernity. Whereas many influenced by the Enlightenment make proofs for God's existence from a place of a priori assumptions of a required theism that necessitates the existence of some divine reality, this thesis turns to God not as an "exception to all metaphysical principles, invoked to save their collapse," but rather as "their chief exemplification,"²¹⁴ — as an implication emerging from the folds of Whitehead's philosophy of organism. For Whitehead, as for this study, God is not some prooftexted hammer extracted from the history of religious development, but is rather a direct result of both the rational, empirical, and speculative philosophy heretofore laid out, *and* the fullest reality of the antiessentialist, nonfoundationalist, de/constructive cosmology of this study. If divine reality is to continue on in the philosophical discourse influenced by postmodern epistemologies, then something like this form of God is almost required by our time. As a disclaimer, much of the following work was constructed for a final paper in a class entitled: *Whitehead and Postmodern Thought* with Dr. Roland Faber, and is here reappropriated, much of it verbatim, for this thesis. It is an odd time to be doing theology in any respect, and given the initial introduction and methodology of this study, it is indeed a precarious and awkward time to speak of God, and especially, of any sort of divine hope. The epistemologies inherited in the postmodern philosophical milieu have so deconstructed the divine concept that it has nearly been stricken from the record of academic thought and relegated to the margins — to the halls of seminaries and decrepit classrooms in waning theological schools. God still presides only as a spectral presence for many in Western academic thought, haunting the subjective experience of those

²¹⁴ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 343.

whose hair stands up at the brush of contact with this lingering holy ghost of a bygone era. On the whole, the decline of divine discourse (and often, the accompanying void of religious praxis) at a societal level has left many who were raised with a given sacred canopy with a dry-heaving sense of great loss.

As a reminder, the postmodern landscape can be characterized as one in which deconstruction has risen to methodological prominence for many — a sort of deconstruction that leaves no stone unturned — including the demolition of sacred ideological temples. Perhaps no one has taken theological deconstruction in the line of Jacques Derrida and its influence on philosophy and theology more seriously than philosopher John D. Caputo, who has defined it as follows:

“The very meaning and mission of deconstruction is to show that things — texts, institutions, traditions, societies, beliefs, and practices of whatever size and sort you need — do not have definable meanings and determinable missions, that they are always more than any mission would impose, that they exceed the boundaries they currently occupy. What is really going on in things, what is really happening, is always to come. Every time you try to stabilize the meaning of a thing, to fix it in its missionary position, the thing itself, if there is anything at all to it, slips away.”²¹⁵

This slippery, exceeding of modern substantive categories and boundaries is a reading of deconstruction in which deconstruction does not exactly equal demolition — but rather, that the meaning and symbology housed in deconstruction are always *more*, always in *surplus* — a surplus that will break free of any categorical assumption or attempt at honing in on a particularity. A close reading of this statement may already notice some Whiteheadian resonances, and Caputo’s articulation of deconstruction here is, as stated in the chapter on

²¹⁵ Jacques Derrida and John D. Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2008), 31.

methodology, an alluring parter for the neowhiteheadian philosophy laid out thus far. One epistemological line that has influenced the deconstructionist mentality performed in the postmodern environment is the school of thought tracing ‘death of God’ philosophies and theologies in the way of German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche — and subsequently, Thomas Altizer and others. As an umbrella of thought, many of these ‘death of God’ philosophies are allergic to metaphysical speculation, and almost all of them dismiss the onto-theological task entirely. Caputo has become known as a thinker who has brought together both philosophy and theology in the deconstructivist tradition (see his 2006 book of the same name, entitled *Philosophy and Theology*) and is a leading proponent of ‘*radical theology*,’ the theological tradition emerging out of this Nietzschean stream after the ‘death of God.’ In this school, many have attempted to move discourse beyond the realm of onto-theology and have employed various critical epistemologies of linguistic, apophatic, and existentialist descent in their task. Upon first glance, the phrase itself, ‘death of God’ seems to suggest atheism, or at the very least, a more than healthy dose of agnosticism — but upon deeper prodding into Nietzsche’s motives and methodology in making this philosophical moves, one might find a more nuanced, affirmative philosophical theology can be teased out that lends itself toward not solely the ‘death of God,’ but also the ‘birth of God’ — a deontologized, ‘weak,’ God who may ground a sort of existential ‘hoping against hope’ as Caputo has deemed it using the phrase from the Pauline tradition.

Nietzsche’s critique of religion (and especially its onto-theological tradition) has much to do with his awakening to the power structures embedded within the line of Hegel’s master/slave dialectic. Nietzsche was not necessarily against an abstract notion of God, or even necessarily, of meaning, but rather of the fixed structures used by states, communities, and religions to impose

certain realities upon society.²¹⁶ Combatting the impulses within religion to prioritize being over becoming and the afterlife rather than the present, Nietzsche laid out an almost poetic-systematic critique of epistemologies that substantiated being and eternity — and really of any transcendental signified that would stand in to uphold the master/slave dialectic.²¹⁷ For Nietzsche, this is the environment in which God had died, and, in its wake, the experiencing subject had also eventually followed suit, creating the postmodern atmosphere that has birthed the aforementioned school of deconstruction. Nietzsche's critique ends up in his affirmation of a 'will to power,' which is an attempt to restore every thing to its own power — to its intrinsic potency, freed from the confines of the coercive power-dialectic. The only issue with this philosophical move is that it lends itself toward a sort of nihilism which descends from its own inherently closed system which inevitably leads to the 'inescapability of exact repetition.'²¹⁸ However, Nietzsche is not the sole philosopher who has attempted to liberate philosophy from coercion. Another thinker who has made a similar move in creating a philosophy that lends itself to affirm becoming and temporal flow was the central philosopher of this study — Alfred North Whitehead. Whitehead's philosophy, on the other hand, has led to the kind of affirmation that doesn't close itself off and feed itself to repetition, but rather, in quite the opposite manner, holds open the novelty necessary to not fall into the nihilistic, physicalist trap of Nietzsche. As mentioned in Chapters I and II above, Whitehead too restores to actual entities the Beauty of becoming — a becoming which, in its creativity, also gives a sort of potency back to the events

²¹⁶ Roland Faber, "Reality, and Beyond III: Simulation, Reality, and the Real" (Lecture, Claremont School of Theology, December 5, 2018).

²¹⁷ Faber, "Reality, and Beyond III: Simulation, Reality, and the Real," Lecture.

²¹⁸ Faber, "Reality, and Beyond III: Simulation, Reality, and the Real," Lecture.

of the world. What's more, Whitehead's philosophy leads also to a novel conception of the divine-world relationship in a nonfoundationalist, antiessentialist, and inherently de/constructive manner — but still offers up a grounding hope that is real, one in which there is an enfolding of divine love whose eschatological horizon is not contained in the telic trajectory of some omega point, but rather in the intensity of value found in the perishing events of the world. This Whiteheadian reconceptualization of the God-world relationship as a mutual process of becoming lends itself as a divine gift to the postmodern pilgrim, who, like Caputo, desires to radicalize one's theological heritage in an empirical frame, while avoiding the fall into the Nietzschean nihilistic trap. Thus, Whitehead's God advances beyond this 'death of God' philosophy and into novel regions of divine possibility where the temptation toward an abstractive onto-theology is resisted, and God is found birthing once again for a postmodern world in which the claim to God can no longer be substantiated naively.

The Weakness of Postmodern Radical Theology

Lyotard was famous for giving us what would prove to be the received definition of the 'postmodern condition' in a commissioned report on the state of knowledge today (in 1979). This condition, he said, is one of 'incredulity' ...about any big overarching story that tries to make the Big Point, to make sense of everything. Then, about a decade later (1987), Lyotard felt obliged to report in again, this time informing us that our condition was even worse than he first thought, even more unnerving, indeed pointless. This condition he called the 'inhuman,' which has a very eerie sound, and makes incredulity look like small potatoes.

— John D. Caputo, *Hoping Against Hope*²¹⁹

²¹⁹ John D. Caputo, *Hoping against Hope: Confessions of a Postmodern Pilgrim* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), 6, italics mine.

In the above passage from Caputo's memoir, *Hoping Against Hope: Confessions of a Postmodern Pilgrim*, he has quoted French philosopher and sociologist Jean-Francois Lyotard in equating the state of the postmodern sojourner with two descriptors that characterize the condition— namely, 'incredulity' and eventually, the 'inhuman.' Caputo has wisely drawn the connection between these two terms which harrowingly describe the existential experience of those traversing the throws of postmodernity. The reason that Lyotard can use such terms to describe the postmodern experience is precisely because of the nihilistic, cosmic predicament of our solar system's forecasted ensuing heat death in which "you will all be toast."²²⁰ Caputo then contrasts this ensuing heat death with the smiles on the faces of unsuspecting beings on a remote planet in the corner of some tiny galaxy in an ever-expanding universe. He goes on to add that:

It's actually worse than Lyotard is getting on. Beyond the solar nihilism he is describing, there lies what we might call 'cosmic nihilism,' meaning that in virtue of the accelerating expansion of the universe, everything, the entire cosmos, not just our solar system, will have finally amounted to nothing. At the very end, there is, there will have been nothing.²²¹

Considering Whitehead's nature of events, this statement that 'there will have been nothing' could not be further from the truth, as all events as they pass into actuality have their value preserved everlastingly and their objectification as potential datum for new prehensive, concrescent unities of cosmic becoming. But for Caputo, this perspective clearly leads one to embrace a sort of cosmic nihilism in which: "There is a certain religion that resides *within* the very cosmic nihilism he [Lyotard] described so well. This implies — if I can get away with saying this — that there is a kind of *theology of nihilism*"²²² in the face of death. This, in essence,

²²⁰ Caputo, *Hoping against Hope: Confessions of a Postmodern Pilgrim*, 8.

²²¹ Caputo, *Hoping against Hope: Confessions of a Postmodern Pilgrim*, 8.

²²² Caputo, *Hoping against Hope: Confessions of a Postmodern Pilgrim*, 18.

is Caputo's notion at the heart of his 'hoping against hope' that embraces the nihilism of grace in a religious form. In this, he finds company with the mystics who advocate for a religion after religion in which he seems also to be able to pray with Meister Eckhart, "God, rid me of God." For Caputo, this posture of hope — and indeed — of smiling faith in the face of a cosmic nihilism, is one that emerges as:

a fidelity to the world, a bodily affective feeling-for-the-world... This faith and hope are the fundamental momentum of our being-in-the-world, a faith and hope in the future, a faith in the promise of the world, which dares to hope in the future as well as in the past, and can come about under many names and many different forms of life. Life is the smile that breaks out on the surface of matter, and faith and hope return that smile.²²³

This is not dissimilar to Nietzsche's vision of the will-to-power in which there is an eternal return, however, the main difference between the two thinkers is that Caputo finds a way to embrace the insistence of 'God' in the face of this cosmic nihilism. This embrace is one that allows him to be arrested by his own religious heritage in the interplay of theological possibility, while all-the-while resisting the temptation to move toward the credulity dismissed by Lyotard.

Caputo develops from this tradition a theology that he deems both 'weak theology' and 'the insistence of God.' In his 2006 book, *The Weakness of God*, Caputo contours his budding theology after the death of God in a affirmative way by stating that:

The abstention that constitutes the diminished state of my theology — God is neither a supreme being nor being itself, neither ontic nor ontological, neither the cause of beings nor the ground of being — represents not a loss but a gain. Blessed are the weak! By untying the name of God from the order of being, it releases the event, sets free the provocation of this name, which disseminates in every direction, setting it free as a vocative force, as an evocative, provocative event, rather than confining its force to the strictures of naming a present entity. I approach God neither as a supreme entity whose existence could be proven or disproved or even said to hang in doubt, nor as the horizon

²²³ Caputo, *Hoping against Hope: Confessions of a Postmodern Pilgrim*, 165.

of being itself or its ground, either of which would lodge God more deeply still in the onto-theological circuit that circles between being and beings.²²⁴

Caputo here transcends the notion of ‘being’ by untying God’s name from the order of being by equating the ‘event harbored in the name of God’ with an ‘evocative force’ which moves beyond the category of being. This articulation sounds similar to Whitehead’s notion of ‘God as poet of the world’ in so much as Whitehead’s concept of God does not operate as a productive or destructive force.²²⁵ Philosopher Steven Shaviro unpacks this to mean that God “knows the world, not in terms of its first causes, but only through its effects, and only in retrospect. God ‘saves’ the world precisely to the extent, but only to the extent, that God aestheticizes and memorializes it.”²²⁶ Thus, for Whitehead, God stands in as a speculative, salvific alternative to Caputo’s conception — which in its deconstructive method is more theopoetic-linguistic than it is rooted some overarching cosmological scheme. Although perhaps Caputo’s explicit resistance of the onto-theological tradition and his articulation here helps poetically render the ensuing possibility of a Whiteheadian divine interrelationality for a theological landscape after the ‘death of God.’ Although Caputo and Whitehead do not mean the same thing in their concepts of God or even of the nature of an ‘event,’ they both claim to hold to a ‘theology of the event’ in which God is reconceived not in terms of the substance ontologies of modernity and premodernity, but namely as an ‘event’ of some quality beyond substance. Playfully, Caputo comments along these lines about the internment of the God of onto-theology:

²²⁴ John D. Caputo, *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006), 9-10.

²²⁵ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 346.

²²⁶ Steven Shaviro, *Without Criteria: Kant, Whitehead, Deleuze, and Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), 161.

God as a Highest Being — a steady hand at the wheel of the universe, ordering all things to good purpose, the spanning providential eye o’erseeing all — has had a good run. But in our postmodern condition we acknowledge the instability of traditional foundations, the ambiguities of the old absolutes, and the complexity of endlessly linking systems without closure...the world is neither a neat, divinely run cosmos nor pure chaos but what James Joyce called so prophetically ‘chaosmos,’ a dance of probabilities sometimes producing improbable results.²²⁷

Caputo’s reflection here is one in which he acknowledges the reality of this God-beyond-being precisely due to the postmodern condition’s instability, ambiguity, and complexity — and all the while, he ends up affirming a reality akin to the ‘chaosmos’ affirmed and employed by process theologians like Catherine Keller and Roland Faber who engage in a form of apophatic metaphysics. However, where process theologians are often engaged in empirical, metaphysical speculation, Caputo does not dare endeavor in the task. He rather situates himself in another form of apophatic theology which is a theology not of *existence*, but rather *insistence* — not of *strength*, but of *weakness* — and, although in some way influenced by Nietzsche, not *death of God* theology, but *birth of God* theology. Here, Caputo reflects:

What has been traditionally called death of God theology is a headline grabber but it is a misleading misnomer — it should have been called the birth of God. God’s death does not consist in God becoming human, but in *not* becoming human. The death of God means that the insistence of God is a seed sown in rock, that it withers on the vine, that it goes unheeded, that God does not come to exist, that the name of God fails to be the name of a deed and is nothing more than a tinkling cymbal. That is why I never speak of the death of God, but of the birth of God or the desire for God...²²⁸

Here, Caputo situates himself in a sort of liminal space in-between the enfleshing of God. For him, the ‘death of God’ of Nietzschean conception is not an invitation only to kill all onto-theological power dynamics, but also to transcend the concept of the divine itself in a sort of

²²⁷ John D. Caputo, *The Insistence of God: A Theology of Perhaps* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013), ix.

²²⁸ Caputo, *The Insistence of God: A Theology of Perhaps*, 36.

resurfacing of divine desire in human enfleshment. In his comments about God's death being as a 'seed sown in rock,' one can envision that the real tragedy would be if divine birth was not shown the hospitality of an advent in human form. It is this evocative divine desire that is at the heart of Caputo's radical theology. But, the question of whether or not Caputo's radical conception of the divine actually offers one a hope-worth-hoping-in-against-hope is another question to be explored in the context of Whitehead's own development. One does have to admit, however, that Caputo's form of theopoetics is alluring, even if only from a poetical, linguistic play more than a conceptual one. Along with Derrida, Caputo continues to ask questions like the following:

When someone says, 'God is love,' do they mean that 'God' is one of the best names we have for love? Or is it the other way around (and this is what Augustine would have asked): Is 'love' one of the best names we have for God? For Derrida there is an irresoluble slipping back and forth between these names and no place to stand that would give us the leverage to arrest this play.²²⁹

Caputo's weak, radical postmodern theology is willing to sway in the tension of these questions, and is committed to providing no real answers to them, which turns out to be an existential posture that many other postmodern sojourners might find attractive. His affirmation of the insistence of a God who shows up in human desire is, for Caputo, a theopoetic claim that seems to reside in the event harbored in the language itself, and is nothing more than an evocative, aesthetic sensibility embedded in the physicality of the world. As to whether Caputo's 'birth of God' theology, as he has self-described it, actually births anything at all other than affection, one cannot say — and if one does attempt, one must unsay it. Perhaps, however, there is another

²²⁹ John D. Caputo, *Philosophy and Theology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), 62-63.

theological possibility that lies on the other side of the death of God, one which fits the same existential posture of a theopoetic intermezzo, and yet resides in the eventual structures of a reality-in-becoming, and *is itself* real — namely as the unity of multiplicity.

Yet Perhaps Nietzsche Might Be Affirmed?

As aforementioned above, Friedrich Nietzsche's critique of God had much to do with his deconstruction of the fixed power structures of the societal and religious authorities of his day. And, as contoured in the previous section of this study, Caputo's conception of God is decidedly situated without any coercive power — that is, it is a conception on the other side of Nietzsche's 'death of God' critiques of power. For Nietzsche, the whole structure that God represents eventually disappears, and there is only the closed system of the self-creative value of individuals in the will-to-power.²³⁰ Steven Shaviro has noted that: "Nietzsche...mocked traditional philosophers' 'hatred of the very idea of becoming,' and worried that 'we are not getting rid of God because we still believe in grammar.'"²³¹ Thus, in an attempt to overcome this self-creative, closed system that gets rid of God and naturally leans toward nihilistic interpretation, Nietzsche created an answer — eternal return, which implies a potentially infinite recurrence of oneself in an infinite cycle of reiterations over various cosmic epochs. Thus, in Nietzsche's system, the value realized is in the momentary transfiguration in which every moment counts and every moment can be seen as fate — as it will happen as it will happen.²³² This closed system of meaning is one in which philosopher Steve Odin has observed of

²³⁰ Faber, "Reality, and Beyond III: Simulation, Reality, and the Real," Lecture.

²³¹ Shaviro, *Without Criteria: Kant, Whitehead, Deleuze, and Aesthetics*, 145.

²³² Faber, "Reality, and Beyond III: Simulation, Reality, and the Real," Lecture.

Nietzsche, that: “For Nietzsche, existence is devoid of value, meaning, or purpose. For Nietzsche overcoming nihilism through life-affirmation of art is accomplished by *aesthetic transfiguration*.”²³³ This aesthetic transfiguration is what is meant by the will-to-power as its own system of becoming is fully completed through Nietzsche’s notion of eternal return. In a similar manner, Whitehead has made a move beyond power — a move that resonates with Nietzsche’s own affirmative system. Here, Shaviri comments again:

Whitehead concurs with Nietzsche in asserting that survival (or mere self-preservation) is secondary in relation to ‘power’ — though the term Whitehead uses is ‘self-creation.’ This is arguably a major facet of what Nietzsche means by ‘power.’ Note that Whitehead explicitly defines ‘power’ as a matter of ‘how each individual actual entity contributes to the datum *from which* its successors arise and *to which* they must conform’. This definition is drawn from Locke, rather than Nietzsche; but I think that it is largely compatible with the Spinozian-Nietzschean sense of ‘power’ as a capacity to affect and to be affected.²³⁴

Similarly, Shaviri has named that both Whitehead and Nietzsche reframe the notion of power and restore it to the experiencing individual, but the main difference is in their own philosophical schemes in which the notion of eternal return plays a different role for each thinker.

Whitehead would not differ with Nietzsche in the sense that every event of the world has responsibility, potential, and self-creative value — giving back potential once more without an alienating structure. Rather, Whitehead would fail to embrace Nietzsche’s eternal return because, for Whitehead, there can be no repetition of events as his system is open, not closed.²³⁵

Philosopher Gilles Deleuze has noted that eternal return in Nietzsche means living from your potentials, not as a reactive action to other forces. Here, Deleuze makes a differentiation from

²³³ Odin, *Tragic Beauty in Whitehead and Japanese Aesthetics*, 61.

²³⁴ Shaviri, *Without Criteria: Kant, Whitehead, Deleuze, and Aesthetics*, 96.

²³⁵ Faber, “Reality, and Beyond III: Simulation, Reality, and the Real,” Lecture.

between a solely physical repetition and reactivity, as he is explicitly against reaction — constant reaction to an impulse from the outside which creates another master/slave dialectic.²³⁶ Instead, Deleuze notes that Nietzsche's transmutation of values (or transvaluation) — which means to become self-creative in value as an actually active entity — implies an affirmation instead of a negation.²³⁷ Here, Shaviro has again commented that:

Inside the order of the Antichrist...the disjunction (difference, divergence, decentering) becomes as such an affirmative and affirmed power. This suggests a Nietzschean reversal of perspectives, a continual movement back and forth between the order of God on the one hand, and the order of the Antichrist on the other. In one direction, the disjunctive synthesis tends toward exclusion; in the other direction, toward multiplicity and affirmation. But neither of these movements is ever completed.²³⁸

This affirmative metamorphosis is thus never completed, and, for Deleuze, this is the most important move that Nietzsche makes in a time in which, as the negative dialectic that characterizes many postmodern thinkers exposes their differential postures, Nietzsche goes with the affirmative posture of potency. This is the ground from which action comes as the affirmation of potentials, not as a reaction to something that moves toward oneself.²³⁹ This is where Nietzsche is closer to Whitehead, although, for Whitehead, the only thing that returns eternally is novelty, which loses the embedded suppressiveness of Nietzsche's closed system. This affirmation of the adventure of becoming is one in which Whitehead looks at the universe, like Nietzsche, not from eternity, but from novelty. It's just that, for Whitehead to create a truly open system, he has to include the concept of valuation and limitation — namely, God.²⁴⁰ This is

²³⁶ Faber, "Reality, and Beyond III: Simulation, Reality, and the Real," Lecture.

²³⁷ Faber, "Reality, and Beyond III: Simulation, Reality, and the Real," Lecture.

²³⁸ Shaviro, *Without Criteria: Kant, Whitehead, Deleuze, and Aesthetics*, 122.

²³⁹ Faber, "Reality, and Beyond III: Simulation, Reality, and the Real," Lecture.

²⁴⁰ Faber, "Reality, and Beyond III: Simulation, Reality, and the Real," Lecture.

where Whitehead dares to dabble in a metaphysical and theological speculation of a new kind, where Whitehead does not see the need to capitulate to ‘death of God’ thinking, but rather, in anticipating much of the antiessentialist, nonfoundational, and de/constructive methodological moves of postmodernity here methodologically embraced by this thesis, he moves with them more toward the aforementioned ‘birth of God’ — yet in a differently nuanced manner. Here, again Shaviro has commented:

Whitehead does not announce the ‘death of God,’ just as he does not announce the ‘end of metaphysics.’ He bypasses Nietzsche, no less than Heidegger. Rather than rejecting metaphysical speculation, Whitehead seeks for a way to do metaphysics otherwise. And rather than eliminating God, he seeks to accomplish ‘the secularization of God’s functions in the world.’ This is one of the most startling proposals in all of *Process and Reality*. The secularization of God, Whitehead writes, ‘is at least as urgent a requisite of thought as is the secularization of other elements in experience....secularization is not the same thing as elimination. It works in a way that is quieter and less confrontational.’²⁴¹

This Whiteheadian *modus operandi* in which he attempts to do ‘metaphysics otherwise’ leads him beyond the jail of Nietzsche’s closed system and toward an adventure in divine becoming. Roland Faber has noted along these lines that Whitehead’s way of talking about immanence and self-creativity necessitates having to give up on an original creator in a classical sense — and thus, on being itself,²⁴² but not, perhaps, on becoming as a form of being. And, if this God of Whitehead’s conception is truly immanent in some way to the world, then this also implies that one can move beyond a God-world relation in which differentiation reigns supreme, and, with Nietzsche, can embrace an affirmative posture in the face of postmodernity — one in which both God and the world of events are in a never-ending dance — a mutual embrace that needs not any

²⁴¹ Shaviro, *Without Criteria: Kant, Whitehead, Deleuze, and Aesthetics*, 104-105, italics Shaviro’s.

²⁴² Faber, “Reality, and Beyond III: Simulation, Reality, and the Real,” Lecture.

power dialectic other than non-coercive love. Here, finally, one can arrive at a place where the points of connectivity between Whitehead and Nietzsche lead to an affirmative posture of becoming in which the ‘death of God’ is not solely a pronouncement of the ‘death of power dialectics,’ but is also a ‘birth of potential,’ a ‘birth of possibility,’ or a ‘birthing of divine immanence,’ in which Whitehead’s conception of God allows one to escape the closed eternal return of Nietzsche and affirm once more the ever-arriving insistence of that divine reality, God. In summary, John D. Caputo, the philosopher of perhaps, puts it this way:

Without death, there is no risk, and without risk, there is no promise, and without promise, there is no life. Where the youthful Nietzsche concludes his sketch of cosmic nihilism by saying, ‘and nothing will have happened,’ the Zarathustra of the mature Nietzsche responds, ‘Was that life? Well then, once more!’ Eternal recurrence for Nietzsche is the attempt to unite ‘being’ as it was understood in Platonism, namely as permanence, which is a Nietzschean ‘lie,’ with becoming as it is understood on the plane of immanence, which elicits the joyful affirmation of Nietzschean...yes I said yes.”²⁴³

The Harmonious Divine Embrace

Think of a poetics as a song of appreciation, like a hymn or a prayer, in the spirit of Merleau-Ponty saying that a given language is a particular way to ‘sing’ the world. Think of a cosmo-poetics as a song sung in response to a cosmic call, to a summons coming from cosmic forces that are themselves being discharged in our bodies. That means that the name of ‘God’ — just like a painting by Picasso and not unlike a chimpanzee stunned by the power of a waterfall — is one of the ways the world comes to words in verbal bipeds such as us, one of the ways the world ‘worlds’ (Heidegger), one of the ways the insistence of the world finds an outlet in existence.

— John D. Caputo, *The Insistence of God*²⁴⁴

This divine rumination began by highlighting the precariousness of divine discourse within postmodernity, and indeed for those outlined at the outset of this thesis as religious

²⁴³ Caputo, *The Insistence of God: A Theology of Perhaps*, 228.

²⁴⁴ Caputo, *The Insistence of God: A Theology of Perhaps*, 177, italics mine.

‘nones,’ by dreaming of some divine reality beyond the kind handed down by the onto-fortified pursuits of modernity. In the face of the cosmic nihilism inherited from Nietzsche’s ‘death of God’ philosophy and Caputo’s appropriation of radical theology as a response to contemporary scientific speculations about the future heat death of the solar system, it is the hope of this thesis that it has been thoroughly illustrated just how extremely difficult it is to say anything meaningful about divine reality these days. And yet, Caputo’s radical theology of hoping against hope, and Whitehead’s immanently real God of becoming offer up two theological possibilities after the ‘death of God.’ Perhaps the divine possibility of our time has not been more beautifully captured than in Caputo’s above reflection on the ‘song’ alluded to by French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty — and perhaps God is too a way to sing the world’s continual insistence, and is yet somehow always another fold from within it. Roland Faber has called this song the polyphilic embrace of multiplicity, which he eventually names as “theoplicity,” which is his name for God.²⁴⁵ Using this framing, perhaps we are always birthing God as God is too the enfolding forceless crooner of existence akin to Whitehead’s ‘poet of the world.’ This theopoetic meditation on God-language is one that can be harnessed by both radical and process theologians alike, albeit with very different outcomes. Whereas Caputo’s theology stays in the realm of poetic expression to resist ontological power dynamics, process theologians in the poststructuralist line of Whiteheadian theory resist onto-substance-theology by poetically expressing an ontology of the event of God through a nondual metaphysical speculation that ends up critiquing power from all angles. For instance, take this passage from Roland Faber’s book *God as Poet of the World*:

²⁴⁵ Faber, *The Divine Manifold*, 104.

Exploring Process Theologies in order to see what process thinkers mean by God as event, although God in Whitehead's articulation is also more than an event:

If with Whitehead we understand God as *event*, this divine event can never be *less* than a person. If the defining feature of personal being is its originality, then God's primordial nature is virtually the unmeasured and unmeasurable standard of this originality...If personal being implies cumulative identity, then God's consequent nature is the quintessence of the reception of life within cumulative unity. If personal being is based on communication, then God's *active, caring concern* toward every event reality within the latter's nexuses in the world constitutes virtually *the* expression of divine personal being. If God is nonetheless still understood as 'event', then it is not as something that happens on a sub personal level, but rather *amid love on a suprapersonal level*, overcoming the particularity, temporality, and chaotic endangerment of all personal being by standing in a relation of redemptive non difference to persons.²⁴⁶

Whereas Caputo's birthing of God would stray from using the language of 'person,' Faber feels completely comfortable using suprapersonal language as it pertains to *Whitehead's concept* of 'personhood' in order to express the quality of divine multiplicity. By 'person' here, Faber is referring to the type of khoric nature of personhood articulated in Chapter III of this thesis, which is "not a soul substance [and] so is God not a soul substance, but in some sense *khora* itself as the foster mother of becoming...But as God event, again, as God unity in diversity, God is not identical to this cosmic space either, but rather signifies its *pneuma*, its spirit person."²⁴⁷ This is a very different theopoetic articulation of divine reality from that spoken in the radical theological camp. Although there are methodological similarities as already traced here through the affirmative Nietzschean school, this process-birthing of God is one in which there is both a more robust account of divine activity (an actual affirmation of divine action which radical theologians would never make), and a hope grounded in a God who seeks greater intensities of

²⁴⁶ Faber, *God as Poet of the World: Exploring Process Theologies*, 108, italics Faber's.

²⁴⁷ Faber, *The Becoming of God: Process Theology, Philosophy, and Multireligious Engagement*, 40, italics Faber's.

cosmic Beauty and receives the world in all its becoming value. In this relational worldview, God offers divine potential and hope-full possibility back to the world in every moment of its becoming. Here, Faber observes:

At every moment of its becoming, a person receives itself not only in originality (future) and continuity (past), but also as the *future of its redeemed past*. Here Whitehead's theological grounding of personal being passes beyond deconstructionist *differance*, transforming it into the *vision* of redeemed wholeness *within* the process of differentiation. Whitehead's basis for personal being is *being loved unconditionally*.²⁴⁸

This is a radically different conception of divine hope — the hope of communion with unconditional polyphilic love at the very center of one's subjective experience as the adventurer of becoming. Whereas Caputo lays claim to the “hoping against hope” of his “nihilism of grace” in the face of cosmic heat death, Whitehead — as interpreted by Faber here — lays claim to a hope in the process of divine intensification of valuable worldly events. Here, it is not the eschatological horizon which brings comfort in some future-residing retroactive eschaton, but rather in that the events of the world are received in their value into the consequent nature of God and offered back to the multiplicitous folds of the world in the form of novel possibilities for infinite becoming — a becoming that achieves the self-creative value of Beauty. For Faber, Whitehead's consequent nature of God (which receives the world of becoming) is not enough for comfort though, as Whitehead's philosophical scheme is not one in which conservation is its main purpose. God doesn't want conservation, God wants intensity — offering the value of the objective world and the value of the past as a living fact in God back into the world of creaturely becoming and perishing.²⁴⁹ Here, Whitehead goes as far as to say that “God is indifferent alike to

²⁴⁸ Faber, *God as Poet of the World: Exploring Process Theologies*, 17, italics Faber's.

²⁴⁹ Roland Faber, “Reality and Beyond II: Process Cosmology” (Lecture, Claremont School of Theology, October 24, 2018).

preservation and to novelty...His aim for it is depth of satisfaction as an intermediate step towards the fulfillment of his own being. His tenderness is directed towards each actual occasion, as it arises. Thus God's purpose in the creative advance is the evocation of intensities."²⁵⁰ Thus, the hope of Whitehead's God is *not* the future aim at some secured omega point of universal culmination, but rather in the mundanely intense realizations of the Beauty of the events of the world. God enfolds them in love as their call and their response (a mundane form of a processual-eventual alpha and omega, beginning and end) — for, every moment counts in Whitehead's cosmos,²⁵¹ and God is the theoplicity of multiplicity counting them. This is something like a ceaseless and rhizomatic, commonplace yet universal resurrection process in which every entangled event of the becoming world is birthed alive again — renewed with Beauty after its perishing.

Lastly, a final deconstructive harmony must be contoured in order to speak meaningfully of divine reality after Nietzsche's 'death of God.' If Caputo opts instead for the 'birth of God' within embodied, creaturely insistence, then Whitehead opts for the en/folding presence of a 'birthing of God' in the open-process of becoming multiplicity. Here, God is both the Mother and the Doula of reality. Here, one can observe that Whitehead's divine vision as again interpreted by Faber:

In *Process and Reality*...moves toward Leibniz in deconstructing Spinoza's divine 'substantialization' of multiplicity by embracing *pure* multiplicity *only* as pure activity. Yet, contrary to Deleuze, in this procedure *divinity* does not become extinct — as one would expect after the 'death of God.' Rather, its concept becomes freed to *mark a*

²⁵⁰ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 105.

²⁵¹ Faber, "Reality, and Beyond II: Process Cosmology," Lecture.

difference within pure multiplicity... The difference between creativity and God is initiated by Whitehead's declared philosophical aim to express only pure immanence."²⁵²

This God is the de/constructive suspension, subtraction, and surplus of the affirmation of immanence as applied by Whitehead's marked difference within pure multiplicity. This however, for Whitehead, is not an abstraction from the process of becoming itself, but is rather the "very event of its affirmation from within pure multiplicity as a groundless 'history' of becoming. With the theopoetic difference, *nothing* is 'ultimate' (not God, not creativity) *except the pure affirmation of multiplicity itself* in the 'dramatization of its possible 'conceptual personae.'"²⁵³

This 'Divine Manifold,' as Faber has so poetically named its event, marks a process-birthing of God on the other side of both Nietzsche's and Caputo's conceptualization. This theory of divine reality combats the epistemologies of postmodernity that tend toward the nihilism of Nietzsche's 'death of God' thinking *itself not as a productive or destructive force*, but rather as a theopoetic effing of the immanent mystery of divine becoming — the theoplicity of multiplicity. This divine hypothesis is an affirmation both beyond and within differentiation — indeed rather perhaps an in/differentiation of Faber's conceptualizing:

Because of the *complication* of multiplicity and theoplicity — their being *folded together* — the theopoetic difference is conceptualized as theopoetic *in/difference*. It is their '*together-folding*,' *their complication of each other and the complicity of one in the other*, in which the manifold is mediated '(to) itself' as manifold. This '(to) itself' is the folding through which we can 'un-name' the complication of the folding of the manifold *divine*. On this path, the *mystery* of folding hinders us from speaking of theoplicity and multiplicity either in terms of a *mere* difference (between the One and another one) or as *mere* identity of both (as if they were the Same)."²⁵⁴

²⁵² Faber, *The Divine Manifold*, 110, italics Faber's.

²⁵³ Faber, *The Divine Manifold*, 111, italics Faber's.

²⁵⁴ Faber, *The Divine Manifold*, 393, italics Faber's.

This process-birthing of God is complicitly an enfolding beyond the ‘death’ conceived of by Nietzsche and also actually the ‘birth’ of Caputo — a mystery of the polyphilic divine folding of theoplicity and multiplicity which is not solely the abstraction of another difference, but rather a way to affirm the process-adventure of becoming that grounds an intensely divine hope of the ever-enfolding Beauty of the world — a real hope for the postmodern pilgrim of birthing God afresh in the perishing passage of both our greatest ideas and the melancholic depths of our lived experience.

In this sense, God is thus the hopeful and harmonious trans/unification of both the individual experience of the processual becoming of one’s own personhood and the communal reality of the nest of becoming — an everlasting uniting within this multiplicity as theopoetic in/difference. In fact, Whitehead refers to God in part as a ‘Harmony of Harmonies.’ A simpler way to say this is that God is the Great and Beauty-full Embrace — the Polyphilic Lover — that widest embrace down in, through, and surrounding the folds and fields of every event in reality that ‘saves the world’ in its perishing by being eternally and compassionately committed to its future becoming of value. This is universal resurrection. Perhaps the primordial and consequent natures of God alluded to by Whitehead (which reflect the nature also of Whitehead’s event) at the outset of this chapter can be imagined as the divine arms embracing the whole of the cosmos in its endless becoming — the “fellow sufferer who understands,” the phenomenal hug of God, the mundane Alpha and Omega, the beginning and end of every event that becomes actualized.²⁵⁵ Perhaps God is the manifold of the ever-swelling Beauty of passing reality, and yet also its ever-present moreness. If it has not been stated explicitly enough yet in this divine exploration,

²⁵⁵ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 351.

perhaps ‘existence’ in the form of that modern, static existence of abstracted ‘being’ which has qualified many articulations of God from Kant to Tillich — is *the wrong category for God altogether*. Perhaps Caputo’s resistance of the category of existence for a divine entity is actually a postmodern gateway that opens to a sort of divine becoming ‘neither as the horizon of being itself or its ground,’ and yet, is somehow nondually both. If God is in any way the theoplicity of folding multiplicity as Faber has suggested, then nonduality perhaps correctly describes the way that the multiplicity multiplicities. Perhaps God is that pleating actor in the dipolar folds that make up Whitehead’s processual, eventual, relational, becoming reality itself — indeed the “One and Many” of Whitehead’s multiplicity that is always immanently connected in relations.²⁵⁶ In a poststructuralist Whiteheadian reading of multiplicity through the lens of Deleuze, folds are always already connections, already unified, not requiring a reductive oneness *or* a reductive manyness. They are both always, already two sides of the same process that cannot be reduced to an existent entity. With Faber, this study affirms that Whitehead’s articulation of the divine manifold is one in which God is the nonduality of mutual immanence of both finiteness and infinity. Philosophy has historically tended toward either seeing God as either infinite or finite, but both are wrong.²⁵⁷ This is namely — as God has always been, a profound mystery. However, God is not a mystery in the sense of a naive sort of mystification without critical inquiry, but rather a mystery that is mystery precisely because it is an *infinite becoming* — that is, a becoming that is always superjecting in its motion, never static, and ever-unknown, yet somehow endlessly known. No wonder it’s impossible to extrapolate and explain this deep mystery in its fullness.

²⁵⁶ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 349.

²⁵⁷ Roland Faber, “Whitehead’s Final Concept of God” (Lecture, Claremont School of Theology, April 25, 2018).

God is infinitely knowable and yet always just beyond our grasp. What if we were to let go of 'being' as a category (for God) altogether, and embraced rather 'becoming' — indeed the mystagogy of becoming — instead? What if godself also becomes as the the most intense and massive expression of this nondual, processual wholing of the cosmos? Perhaps God might be found not as realized, or as one finite realization, but as *a realizing* of divine reality that is inextricably bound to the One cosmos that is ever-new and always a many-advancing-forward, itself already a multiplicity of creative syntheses of becoming in the grand symphony that is the Harmony of Harmonies. And perhaps it is this folding into this divine embrace — the very embrace of the God of Beauty — that perhaps we might experience the Peace of passage — that polyphilic Peace that enfolds and passes (through) all prehensions on this cosmic adventure of becoming.

Chapter VI: A Communal Exploration of Processual, Nondual Praxis - Way Collective

This final discussion opens with a question and hypothesis framed by Philip Clayton and Steven Knapp that provides the setting within which the practical application of the above theory in a Western, postmodern, communal setting can be more fully explored. Clayton and Knapp ask and intuit:

What kind or kinds of religious community are likely to serve the needs of those who arrive at (roughly) the same theological conclusions we do? To begin with, such a community will invite the participation of all who find themselves attracted to the teaching, actions, or personality of Jesus, as portrayed in the biblical accounts, re-imagined by later interpreters, and/or reconstructed by historical scholarship. It will not matter where the participants locate themselves along the spectrum of beliefs and other attitudes...or even whether they regard themselves as ‘Christians.’²⁵⁸

What Clayton and Knapp are highlighting here is that communities that will serve the needs of those who arrive at similar conclusions as those advocated for in their book, *The Predicament of Belief*, namely — the sort of Christian minimalism refined by contemporary science and philosophy — are communities that will receive the tradition through the lens of historical criticism. These communities will function in such a way that ‘it will not matter where participants locate themselves on the spectrum of beliefs and other attitudes, or even whether they regard themselves as Christians.’ This is a crucial component that needs to be inhabited by religious communities in the postmodern milieu whose culture has been thoroughly secularized, historicized, and relativized by the various epistemological critiques made within postmodernity. These, are, in essence, communities that will necessarily function in some manner ‘beyond belief’ — or beyond *requiring belief* from their community members. Along these lines, John Haught also contributes that “The intellectual credibility—even the survival—of all religious

²⁵⁸ Clayton and Knapp, *The Predicament of Belief: Science, Philosophy, Faith*, 145.

traditions depends now on how convincingly they adapt their beliefs and aspirations to a scientifically understood universe whose spatial extension, temporal scale, and creative unfolding were unknown to religion's founders and main teachers."²⁵⁹ Here, Haught also confirms Clayton and Knapp's intuitions regarding the nature of religious community — to be specific here, that communities must become adaptive given the cosmological innovations of our time and acknowledge that there is more that has been realized since the founding of the world's great ways of being. This is a time of updating and enfolding our religious traditions — a time in which communities will have to take the tradition to unseen horizons and inhabit a revolution of sorts unavailable to the founders of the great ways of being. This updating will require cosmological insight, philosophical soundness, and theological exploration in light of contemporary developments in physics and philosophy as they are applied to one's methodology of communal life. The *Way Collective*, a community developing in Santa Barbara, CA is inhabiting just this liminal, migratory space in the postmodern religious landscape, while becoming decidedly trans-belief and pro science and philosophy.

Applying the theory of Alfred North Whitehead in its process-relational modality, the *Way Collective* has created a community 'beyond belief' (as a requirement) in which they are committed to shared life together in common values and practices. There is no belief statement, no expressed doctrinal list of propositions to sign-on to — but rather only five core practices and values to be lived out in community together. This community is not anti-beliefs, or anti-creedal, but rather is decidedly *noncreedal* in its appropriation of the Christian tradition, while allowing for the full 'spectrum of belief' of Clayton and Knapp's articulation to be present in the

²⁵⁹ Haught, *The New Cosmic Story: Inside Our Awakening Universe*, 45.

community. In this manner, they have identified five core practices, which are, in order — Connection, Contemplation, Curiosity, Creativity, and Compassionate Action; and five corresponding values, which are, in order — Hospitality, Mystery, Wisdom, Beauty, and Love/Justice. This methodological form is, in praxis, a way beyond the trappings of the expressions of propositional Western Christianity that so many ‘nones’ are leaving in droves. It is also thoroughly process-relational in its conception. It can be seen that the practices begin with committing to connection (relationality) and end with compassion (the feeling the feelings of others described in Whitehead’s philosophy of organisms), while the movement of the three practices in the center are contemplation (mystagogy of becoming), curiosity (adventuring into new ideas and integrating transdisciplinary scholarship), and creativity (novelty expressed artfully in community). These five practices create a process-relational frame that is a holism in which those navigating the postmodern landscape can find a spiritual home that transcends the temptations of much of the empiric and enlightenment Christianity that has gone before it — that form that is indeed infected by the crusading impulse of *Christendom*. This form of Christianity, I associate with ‘the other five C’s,’ which are Crusade, Coerce, Convert, Conform, and Colonize. This is the form of Christianity which more and more young people are saying a hard ‘no’ to, and voting with their feet as to the ineffectiveness of the power dynamics and consumer mindset rampant in this other paradigm. This community meets weekly in a ‘Dinner and Dialogue’ setting to share a meal, participate in contemplative practice, engage ideas in a conversational setting, create artful-experiential space, and move toward compassionate action toward self and others. In this process, Jesus is still kept as the central figure in his person and teachings, while building relationships with other wisdom traditions. The core impulse behind this methodology is to open

people to the adventure of becoming — in essence, to set their feet on the new grounding which is itself the adventure beyond propositional thinking — that mystagogy of passage that is the realization of Whitehead's ephemeral Beauty as realized in the life of an individual in a wider communal field. The 'new normal,' for lack of a better phrase, for this community is migration, is flow, and is the praxis of contemplative nonduality as expressed by Cynthia Bourgeault.

In this, we are finding that many postmodern spiritual sojourners are finding a home together in a fundamentally alternative way than the stages of faith that determined a certain lived religious praxis before. This new form of community has decidedly positioned themselves to be completely nondual in its language as well, as its values and practices can be thoroughly Christianized or thoroughly secularized — in short, the verbiage and praxis are hospitable toward anyone who finds them attractive. There is no belief-bias that must be affirmed in order to participate in this form of beloved community. Rather, one is solely responsible for committing to the community, to shared life, and to deepen one's own religious praxis and hopefully transform one's own subjective experience through contemplative living. The transformational architecture of a community of shared values and practices like the *Way Collective* is thoroughly non-hierarchical, compliant with the ability to bring contemporary science and philosophy into its communal discourse, and also seeks to bring those lines of thought to bear in order to frame how the adventure of becoming is one in which the religious dimension of life has arisen in the interiority of the cosmic process. As far as its christological emphasis, the *Way Collective* does not take a stance as to there being a definitive statement of the meaning of Jesus' life and teachings akin to Clayton and Knapp's formulation here:

The Christian proposition, again, that the infinite grace and compassion of the UR [ultimate reality] itself were present, and in some sense continue to be present, in a particular human being, namely Jesus of Nazareth. We now wish to argue that a shared focus on this core proposition is sufficient to define a community of Christian life and worship.²⁶⁰

The aforementioned statement resounds beautifully with the core ethos of the *Way Collective's* sensibilities, as it seeks to keep Jesus central, and more generally, to see the universe with its complexity of life and forms as ultimately valuable — which is a way to affirm the grace and compassion of ultimate reality as present in Jesus of Nazareth. Overall, the Way Collective has continued to resist the definition of belief statements at every turn, has persisted in its commitment to contemplative life together — prioritizing the aforementioned practices and values, and, as such, has employed a nondual strategy in bringing the communal embodiment of the religious dimension of life to a postmodern world so desperately in need of a way beyond the trappings of Western Christendom. This community serves as a representation of one of the novel possibilities available in our time to develop paths of shared religious life in which the temptation to substantiate beliefs is continually abstained from, so that it might hold the possibility of adventure as central to the community, and is thus an example of the outworking of this thesis in communal praxis.

²⁶⁰ Clayton and Knapp, *The Predicament of Belief: Science, Philosophy, Faith*, 146.

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